POEMS & SONGS

BY

JOHN RENTON DENNING.

1888.

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DEDICATION.

TO LIEUTENANT-GENERAL HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS ARTHUR WILLIAM PATRICK ALBERT, DUKE OF CONNAUGHT and STRATHEARN, EARL OF SUSSEX; K.G., K.T., K.P., G.C.S.I., G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E., C.B., A.D.C., Commander-in-Chief of the Bombay Army; Scots Guards, and Colonel-in-Chief of the Rifle Brigade (The Prince Consort's Own).

May it please your ROYAL HIGHNESS,—I am not unaware that, in the present day, a dedication is, as a rule, a formal and conventional production. The lengthy dedication of our forefathers has been swept into the limbo of the past, as surely as the coracle of the ancient Briton, or as entirely as the ancient Briton himself. But I shall make no apology for reviving to some extent an old custom

which perhaps fell into disuse, not so much from its own inherent imperfections as from the imperfections of those who finally agreed to do without it. In having been graciously permitted to dedicate this work to your Royal Highness, I have realized a hope and an ambition which first came to me, many years ago, when serving as a private soldier in the 1st Battalion Rifle Brigade, under your Royal Highness's command.

Fortune, I confess, made me a soldier; although Nature, under whose influence I came first, made me in some sort a stringer together of rhymes, and I cannot sufficiently express how grateful I am and how much an honour I feel it to myself that your Royal Highness should have kindly given me the opportunity of linking my humble name with your Royal Highness's illustrious name, and with that of the gallant Regiment in which I first shouldered the rifle.

I have now been a soldier nearly ten years; and although those ten years cannot quite be looked upon as belonging to the "piping time of peace," yet, so far as I myself am concerned, I seem to

have used the pen, as indeed is the actual case, with more freedom than I have used the sword.

The Rifle Brigade, among its many brilliant and gallant soldiers, has, I think, brought forth few poets; perhaps for the reason that Mars would be a rough foster-mother at best; although I am not unmindful that many who have in times past distinguished themselves in the Arts of Peace, have been worthy disciples and worshippers of the god of battles, who, I may observe, is, in no small degree, the guardian of all arts and sciences, whatsoever. What critics will say to my work I know not. I am conscious that in this book there are many imperfections; but even as some alloy of sin doth not debar one from being numbered in the category of good men, so do I trust, that my verses may not be found so far debased from the ancient currency of the Muse as to want the true ring of honest metal.

I have little more to add; but that little is the humble, the grateful and fervent wish of the bard. May your Royal Highness long live in health

happiness and prosperity, to read, in days yet to come, should I be spared to write, verses more worthy of your Royal Highness's praise, more worthy of our glorious English literature, and in all humility, I would say, more worthy of

Your Royal Highness's
Most humble and obedient Servant,
JOHN RENTON DENNING.

POONA,
April 1888.

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PREFACE.

The exile of the following poem is not so much a mere creature of airy phantasy as the reader may be inclined to think. The popular clap-trap which, in regard to Indian questions, is freely used in England by a certain clique of would-be reformers, must always be intensely disheartening to many Englishmen in India. By men so eloquent as Mr. Bright, and by gossiping demagogues so theatrical as Mr. Lalmohun Ghose, the Englishman in India is often represented as being a man whose path of life is merely a highway of roses. By certain political busybodies, an ample income and an almost despotic use of power are slyly suggested or openly stated to be the ordinary characteristics of the Anglo-Indian official class, and a highly-drawn picture of the wretched contrast which the lives of the "dumb millions" present when compared with the luxurious existence which is enjoyed by their rulers, is held up again and again for the purpose of exciting the honest (?) indignation of the tax-paying, justice-loving, charitable Britisher. I am far from denying that a contrast does exist, but the happiness of the native and the happiness of the European are dependent for their very existence on causes and conditions widely dissimilar. But when, in most mischievous ignorance of the relative position of the two races, the salaries which are paid to Englishmen in India and the European's mode of living are placed in juxtaposition with the salaries paid to natives in the employment of Government, and the wages earned and the social comforts which are enjoyed by the civil native population—when, in short, the Englishman who

has never been in India is made to believe that his countrymen are taking more than their share of the loaves and fishes, and iniquitously turning a deaf ear to the lawful claims and human aspirations of the natives, it is but meet and right that a view so distorted should be corrected.

Many Englishmen in India are comparatively poor, and pay dearly enough by enforced separation from their country and their kindred, for any money they may save, if they should be lucky enough to save any, or for any pension which may be awarded them, should they be so fortunate as to live to enjoy it in perfect health for any considerable time.

It was not my intention to have touched even thus lightly and digressively upon this large question of comparison, which is a subject that I have studiously avoided discussing in the poem. But what I have here written can stand, as it may, perhaps, throw a side light on a question which, if one may judge from the cheese-paring policy of commissions, seems to require a little illumination.

It is well, perhaps, that those who are so far superior to their countrymen out here, as to loftily and comfortably remain quite ignorant of them or their surroundings, should have the chance offered them of knowing that there is another side to the picture which is so vividly present to their mind's eye.

In conclusion, I would add, that the exile is not a misanthrope, but he is what Mr. Bright and Mr. Lalmohun Ghose are perhaps not—a man who has a keen sorrow and stinging grievance of his own outside humanity's natural and inevitable bereavements —even although his sympathies may not be broad enough, and susceptible enough, and credulous enough to embrace the imaginary sorrows and imaginary grievances of imaginary people.

THE EXILE.

The ever-ageing world, forgetting now,
In the swift visions of its modern thought
And glib complacency for deeds well done,
Some simple names that moved it long ago;
Perchance, will smile, with delicatest scorn,
At even one poor word whose letters dare
To symbolize in modern English speech
The dreary thought of human banishment!
For banishment, when uttered by the tongue,
Calls up all woful tales that we have heard
Of hapless prisoners sent to lonely isles,
Who, when that they have died, have left their bones
Upon the senseless, unimpassioned strand,
For monument and brass and epitaph!
Or else the word, as by a charm, awakes,
In the still brain, forgotten histories
Of titled minions hurled from fickle power,
Through having, at some dim, misguided chance,
Or lapse of tact in polished courtliness,
Turned all the sentiment of princely love
Into mere gall and contumelious scorn,
We think of him whom fell Domitian threw
Into the hissing bath of boiling oil;
And can, in fancy, follow him afar

To Patmos isle, where o'er his senses burs
The awful visions of Apocalypse.
Grim, rocky shores and arid deserts wild
Of Araby or Libya, frozen wastes
Siberian stretching unto seas congealed,
Colour the quick reflections of the brain
Whene'er we think of men unfortunate,
Cut off from all the congregated world.
Such things belong to days now sepulchred
In the dim, vast and yawning gulf of Time,
When this our native planet was engirt
With thick, Cimmerian darkness, which shut out
Country from country, and with barricade
Of ignorance and wonder kept apart
The groping nations of the early world.
But now so ample is fair Science grown,
And fed with so great plenitude of power,
That Earth's old axis quickens out of mind,
And twirls us out our days and nights and noons
More pregnant with the progeny of Fate,
Than were the months of our cold ancestors.
All latitudes are one; the severed poles,
And, 'twixt their points, the equinoctial round,
With Capricornus zoned towards the south,
And Cancer to the north upstretching far,
Are joined by steam and fine, electric fire;
Until broad, envious and resounding Space,
With all his stretched out braggadacio
Of ocean, continent and sea-girt isle,
Is, by compression and conjunction swift,

Now quite subdued and made annihilate:
While Time, who was of yore the henchman grave,
And meet coadjutor of distance vast,
In keeping far apart all human kind,
With miles of leagues and dim unmeasured miles,
Now trips it merrily from east to west,
And, in one turn of this most busy Earth,
Is made to do what erst he would have spun
From seed-time unto joyful harvest home!
We leave behind us Hooghly's shoalful stream,
Calcutta's palaces and moist Bombay,
And, passing swift where Nilus spreads his arms
O'er the strange land of pyramid and sphinx,
Can whirl through Europe and in London rest,
Ere three brief weeks of travel slip away,
With Dekhan sun upon our bronzèd cheeks,
And Urdu rising glibly to our tongues,
And Hindu patois ringing in our ears,
Even amid the voices numberless
That surge around the golden shores of Thames!
Is there a charm in man's frail handiwork,
Some essence of himself in brick and stone,
Which can, by occult gravitation, draw
From divers climes, the grave inhabitants
Of countries various and far removed,
Towards that wondrous city of the west
Which is become the cynosure to which
The eyes of nations as by instinct turn?
The old world went to Rome, but, even then,
The glorious city of the seven hills,

Throned in magnificence imperial,
Ne'er sounded in her palaces and homes
So true an echo of the Earth's deep voice
And wordy conflict multitudinous,
As London, thou to-day, in thy great ear,
Canst gather up and with vast utterance
Re-echo to all nations ranged afar
Climbing the convex of the globe around.
What was old Babylon compared with thee?
Or that great city whither he who lived
In the Leviathan was sent to warn?
Palmyra, Tyre and Sidon, or the now
Almost deserted, stately Bijapur
Erst the fair prey of martial Aurungzebe?
Time-honoured London! Venerable mart!
Keen-burning focus of all life and heat,
Civic magnificence and commerce wide
That stream from sources metropolitan!
The world's true capital, whose instincts broad,
Life international, energies urbane,
Voice cosmopolitan and freedom proud
Are all enshrined in thy pulsating heart,
As are the virtues of our English race
Set in the noble bosom of our Queen!
Dear London, let me raise my voice to thee,
Again, in memory, pass with joyful tread
Adown thy well-known and belovèd streets
With all thy life around me! On thy skirts,
Where Brixton rises to the gentle south,
First drew I breath, and gazed, in infancy,

O'er green fields stretching meltingly away
To Sydenham, Dulwich, Streatham, verdure-clad!
But thou hast swallowed up my pastures green,
Or rather, London, in thy circling arms,
Hast thou embraced them as a mother fond,
And they, as laughing children do, are now
Come to the aspect grave of virile men
Drest out in sombrer clothing, but with still
The English heart beneath their vesture stern.
Youngling I came into thy mighty heart,
Knew all thy thoroughfares from tuneful Bow
To rural Acton—loved thee all the same,
Whether I paced the muse-devoted Strand,
Or roamed the precints of thy ancient burgh,
Or rambled far afield to quiet spots
Where all thy concentration oozed away
In straggling villas, quite dissolved at last!
In those bright days, among the little knot
Of mine acquaintance, knew I one whom Fate
Had made a sport of; hurling him, when young,
From fair prosperity to all the gloom
And pinching shifts that come with straitened means.
But with a fertile brain and cheery heart,
And panoplied in Hope, Youth's armour bright,
He met Adversity all cap-a-pie,
And fought her bravely, yea, with good success;
Until, at last, in India he became
A member of that service which we call
Uncovenanted. Glad were all his thoughts,
For he, although he could not hope to climb

The topmost rung of social eminence,
Nor utter words oracular in state,
Nor place a prince's income in his fob,
Nor topsy-turvy turn collectorates
With brilliant scratching of official pen,
Yet still looked forward to good earnest work,
Love conjugal and pure, domestic joys,
With wages that should o'er penurious cares
Lift him and those he loved; till he should end
His term of service in a foreign clime,
And spend within the country of his birth,
In ease well-merited, his dimming age.
I have his letters full of Indian news;
Epistles that I prize, for he who touched
The page with so much brightness, pathos, love,
Vivid description and delightful talk,
Is now no more, but, when he was alive,
He was, though far apart for many years,
"Mine own familiar friend," companion dear,
In losing whom I lost some sweet of life
And marrow of existence.

He for me,
With graphic portraiture of pen facete,
Sketched oft in bulky budget by the mail,
The undulating, rocky, Dekhan plains,
Where lifts the yellow grass its barbèd head.
The gummy babul, dark and closely-grained,
Fantastically-twisted, sparsely-leaved
And full of venomed thorns, with inch-long ants
Climbing its rugged girth, an ebon swarm.

Then would he tell me of the prickly pear
With its red fruit and monstrous spiky growth,
Defying drought in dusty ugliness,
The haunt of cobra and of cooing dove.
He limned for me the shady mango tope,
The huge, rough jack-fruit and the stately palm
Rising deep-notched from trunk to royal crest,
With all its wealth of fruitage nestling dark,
Full of sweet food and juicy milkiness,
Beneath the shade of leaves, majestic thrown
As are the plumèd feathers of a knight
Who hath blood royal in his armoured limbs.
With him, in fancy, I have often stood
Beneath the peepul, whose smooth branches bear
Music soft-rustling in their creaky leaves,
Which chant a dirge above the shapeless stone
Red-daubed and shrined a heathen deity.
I've seen the bearded banyan stretching down
Its tufted vigour by Godavery's banks,
And climbed with him Khandalla's heights and roamed
The dusty, red-dyed highways of Belgaum,
Where lifts its tapering shaft the ringed bamboo
Waving high up in balmy atmosphere
Its feathered elegance. The kite brown-winged,
Unconquerable minion of the sky,
Has torn his quarry in my friend's large page,
Or, wheeling in the cloudless firmament,
Rising to regions cool, ethereal,
A moveless speck among the outshined stars,
Has moved my soul to envy

He has told
Of green, slim parrot, shrill and harsh of tone,
That flies where Ahmednagar's moated fort
In bastioned grimness views the country round
Or, in quick words that leapt across the page,
Has he described the squirrel bushy-tailed,
Of plain, grey coat, dark-striped and almost winged
When swift from branch to branch he gambols free,
Swarth buffalo with myna on his back,
And palpitating lizard in the sun.
So too, from Asia's torrid latitudes,
The lean, sly, timid jackal in mine ear
Has howled his plaint beneath the rounded moon,
As though my couch were on the jungle's edge
In some mofussil station.

He would tell,
For he was one who loved great Nature's moods,
How the sun scorches all the country round,
Till dust gains mastery o'er grass and weed,
And scrub and wilding flower feed the whirl
Of some tall column whose revolving cone
Marches triumphant o'er the blinding plain :
Or how, in clear, calm, oriental eves,
The young new moon most beautifully hangs
In sky serene, a golden Argosy,
With all her curved and bulging darkness vast
Changed by the elemental atmosphere
Into a silver canopy that seems
A dome of clouded crystal, lightly poised,
As by some cunning architect of heaven,

Who fain would mask the errant loveliness
Which shyly peeps out nightly phase by phase;
Until, full-grown, the glorious orb outshines
All stars and planets in th' empyrean fixed;
Making Arcturus pale and shrinking up
Orion's belt of equi-distant worlds,
The Southern Cross and even old Charles's Wain
To tiny points of steely lustre dim!
Once, too, he wrote me of the fierce monsoon
That sweeps the crests and valleys of the Ghauts,
Creating from innumerable rills
Cascades of silver, which, when viewed afar,
Seem only scarves of glittering purity
With which Dame Nature has enraimented
Descents precipitous and ledges vast.
And he, with gentle humour, would pourtray
How earth and air wake into teeming life,
With sound of universal harmony,
From pool, and brake, and field, and rock and dell;
How the frogs croak throughout the soaking night,
Grating the nerves of dry, hepatic men,
And how all forms of busy insect life
And things envenomed crawl into the rooms,
From crabby scorpions unto monstrous ants
And armour-plated, stinging centipede.
He would descant of creeds, and dress and caste,
Describing all, from puffy, plump Parsees,
(For so he called them in a cheerful vein
Bent on alliteration) down to him
Who tills the ground, the ryot whom we call,

His letters first were full of awkward names,
"Chupprassies," "nullahs," "puttawallahs," these
And many more, until he gave the sense,
Were to my western, dim intelligence,
(For Indian books were books I had not read)
Only fantastic names and nothing more.
But, by degrees, I understood them all;
The lank-haired slippered, greasy son of gain
Yclept Marwari, and the Bhattia gross;
The bearded Moslem, follower of him
Who from Arabian sands struck fiery faith
Which set the hearts of millions in a blaze
From Asia unto Grenada— the sleek,
Thin-fingered, low-voiced Brahmin with his creed
Set on his forehead for the world to mark:
The dark Mahratta, who with legends wild
Of Sivaji and songs of Tuka Ram,
Or dim, old stories of Chand Bibi's time,
Beguiles the hours around his jungle fire.
All these I knew; until, when I went out,
For once my wanderings took me to the East,
They were to me as men familiar grown,
Whom I had not seen for some length of time,
Rather than strangers quite, upon whose forms
My eyes before had never chanced to gaze.
What took me to the good port of Bombay,
And thence to Poona, may be set aside
As touching not my tale; suffice to say,
That when, upon one blazing afternoon,
About the season of the mango rains,

I first saw Poona dust upon my feet,
And in the Dekhan capital drew breath,
I hurried swift as two lean, country steeds,
(Whipped by a ragged and wide-staring wight)
Could take me to the house of my old friend.
He lived towards thesouth, and those who know
The winding, dusty and uneven road
Which runs hard by Wanowrie rifle range,
Could soon, without much cogitation, find
Should chance or fortune ever take them thither,
His cool, thatched bungalow.
It faced the west—
Far to the left uprose the barren ghauts,
And, standing in the setting sun's broad path,
As though he were a promontory fixed,
Long since deserted by the tides and waves,
In the hot distance, from the billowy plain,
Steep Singhur raised his head : Parbutty's shrine
And lightning-shattered walls stood up engirt
With sylvan boscage and green, waving fields
Of juicy sugar-cane.
I found my friend
In the verandah of his Indian home;
And, though full thirty years of change and care
Had left their mark upon us since we two,
With strong hand grip and cheery laugh had parted,
We knew each other well. His portrait, I,
Within my album, in my English home,
Had given the place of honor. He, I saw
With pleasure, as I glanced into his room,

Had set my photograph within a frame,
And, in his modest bungalow, mine was
The face that first did greet me from the wall.
Most marvellously bright, most strangely sad,
Most moving influence art thou, Friendship, when
No time can stale thee, and harsh severance,
Although it stretch across three dim decades,
Is powerless to wrap thee in the mist
Of cold and indistinct forgetfulness—
Cool thy warm heart, or shrivel up, at las
In bloodless atrophy thy graceful form,
Which in the days of yore was made create
Of youthful loves reciprocally kind!
It was so sweet to grasp my old friend's hand,
To look into his eyes now not so bright,
To hear again his voice now more subdued,
That if the warm tear came into our eyes,
And if our voices with unwonted thrill
Uttered poor human greetings, still, we felt
Not then one whit ashamed, but, rather, drew
Delicious joy from out the vanished past,
Forgot our wrinkles and our whitening hairs,
Till we were almost laughing boys again!
Bleak Scotia, land of Burns and barleycorn!
Thou hast from "Maidenkirk to Johnny Groats"
Full many a spring from which the whisky flows;
And blest beyond far sunnier climes art thou
In having given to this solemn Earth
A son most jovial, who, however far
Wide of the mark in Bacchanalian praise,

Invoked the social spirit of the bowl,
And over whisky waxed more eloquent,
In mirthful and imperishable song,
Than have those calmer, water-drinking bards,
In panegyrics of the limpid stream
Which Nature, of her bounty, brightly pours
From mossy spring or plashing fountain cool!
So be it. I'll not take the quarrel up;
I only know, dear Scotia, that there are
Devoted drinkers in the land of Ind,
As ever tipped a pannikin on end
In thy "Auld Reekie." Solid men and grave
Are to be found in Dekhan, who can warm
Into brisk, social converse o'er the bowl;
And, after braving hosts of mortal ills,
Live out the cheery winter of their lives
In fog-bound Britain, with no inward pang,
Save that a mild regret may vex their souls,
That in this changeful, transitory scene,
Good whisky-drinking cannot last for aye!
Over our glasses, Gordon, (such his name)
And I stirred up the embers of the past
For two delightful hours, as men will do,
When they can wake forgotten incident;
Flash from the brain the swift, magnetic fire
Of kindling recollection, and from out
The cold embracement of the mournful tomb,
Bring back to rosy life the moving form,
The speech familiar, vesture palpable
Of comrades in life's battle long ago!

Then dinner came, and, as my host and friend
Offered me bed and board, so long as I
Would break his bread and sleep beneath his roof;
I fell in with his hospitality,
And walked and talked and drove with him until
Nine months were fled; when as the nights and morns
Grew cold about December, then I left
The playmate of my boyhood, never more
To gaze upon his much loved face again,
For, truth to tell, I left him in his grave!
He told me much before he passed away:
Of failing health, but that I well divined,
Of hopes unrealized, embittered years,
And monetary cares and love from which
The warmth had all departed. This to me
Was new and strange: his story I can tell,
Almost as he, a month before he died,
Gave it at intervals and waifs of time.

* * * *

" My first five years in India passed apace
In learning languages and eating codes,
Dry paragraphs and clauses, sections vast,
Dull literature ambiguously loose,
Provocative of error, meek appeals
And resolutions stretching fathoms long
If all their paragraphs were end on end.
Yet, still I liked my new life passing well,
The charm and novelty potential drew
Full oft a word of chafing utterance
Into the bow-drawn softness of a smile.

And then, although, a solitary man,
Save when I left the districts in the rains,
I had a few good books, my gun and dog,
A scoundrel of a servant, and a horse,
Half Dekhan and half Arab, which I bought
Of an old Moslem, Ali Khan by name,
At Ahmednagar horse show, and my steed
For ever after that was Ali Khan.
But those five years were always bright with hope,
And, in hope's brightness, as, at early dawn,
Shineth the morning star, so in my sky
Of youthful happiness there gleamed aloft
The star of human and requited love.
You may remember her that was my wife?"
I nodded with a mute and pained assent
For well I knew the old wound bled again.
"So then," continued he, "when she came out,
And bright in womanhood was mine to love,
To live for and to die for, then, I thought,
For we are dreamers even to the end,
That circumstance, and fate, and envious days
Had spent their wrath upon me once for all
Ere she and I touched lips as man and wife!
Ah, those were halcyon days! A wondrous peace
Crept into both our hearts; it was as though
We were in lazy softness gliding down
Some placid stream in smooth forgetfulness
Of all things save the present; life became
As much the toy of circumambient time
As was the languid ripple at the prow!

It seems but yesterday our boy was born,
The first begotten of our love; I can,
With something of a dull pain in my breast,
Recall those days, and think how fondly then
His proud young mother, as is women's wont,
Would press the bright-eyed rogue to her true heart
And smother him with kisses! Love, alas,
Is powerless to turn aside the hand
Of icy Death, whose numbing finger froze
The ruddy current in our youngster's veins
Ere he had smiled four years of life away!
One other child we lost, and then, the third,
A little girl blue-eyed and golden-haired,
Who season after season grew more pale,
Until a great fear rose up in our hearts,
(For our good station doctor shook his head
And talked of English air and colder climes)
That we should lose our pretty Amy too.
And so, at last, in sadness blent with hope,
I parted with them both. You may not know
What 'tis for simple mortals who have drawn,
As I had then, all life's felicity
Into the modest compass of a home,
To break the gentle charm that hems one round
And turns life's thorns to roses. Though we told
Our anxious fancies and our worried hearts
That one short year would bring us all again
In happy union 'neath the Indian sky,
There was much sadness in our severance;
And, though we laughed the natural gloom away,

Our eyes, methinks, unwonted lustre flashed,
That leapt not from the crystal springs of joy,
When the last kiss and fond embrace were given.
My friend, our hearts too truly pierced the veil
That hides the future, for, in simple sooth,
We never wept nor smiled good-bye again!
All kinds of petty and vexatious cares
Crept into life and stung me into pain.
My child, though stronger in her English home
Than in this languid country of her birth,
Still pined without the ruddy hue of health,
For ever needing wise physician's skill.
Then, too, my income barely served to meet
The craving maw of wide expenditure,
That seemed to have a hundred gaping throa
In India and in England; whilst my pay,
Shrunk by the eating canker of exchange,
Dwindled away a fourth, till, month by mont
I grew embittered, felt that I and those
For whom I worked and toiled were meanly robbed
Of the hard-earned and honest recompense
Which was our lawful right. But let that pass:
The letter of the law is made, methinks,
The curst oppressor of the law's true spirit,
When, as you know, but lately, it falls out
That Justice sees a bar to modern claims
In the dry sentences of days gone by;
Taking no note of times which are become
Choked with conditions all impertinent
To the wise rules of former fiscal seers.

In spirit then of mere indignant scorn
I leave that theme, although the growing ill
Has been a shadow in my later life,
Growing more dark and longer as the years
Have travelled through their seasons.
Oft I yearned
To see again my wife, but lack of funds
Bade me crush out the sweet thought from my heart
And send the warm wish, like an anchorite,
Into the desert future. My one child
Grew up from babyhood to be, at last,
A woman, in whose woman's heart and mind
I was a shadow—nay, a loveless name—
A mere abstraction—totally unknown;
Save through her mother's loving narrative,
My letters written oft in gloomy mood,
A few small presents, trifles, knick-knacks, toys,
And thrice my photograph in twenty years.
But what are books and presents? Senseless things!
Or silent pictures stolen from the sun?
Or even a mother's laudatory speech,
When the young ears on which her praises fall
Have never heard the voice for which, indeed,
True love is pleading? Can a daughter's eyes
With filial brightness welcome home the gift
That comes as earnest of a father's love,
When they have never met the tender glance
Of joy paternal? And the lineaments,
That from the portrait motionless look out,
Are but a mask that hides the inward man,

Whose true life beats in his warm arteries,
Gleams in his glance and musically thrills
Through merry laugh and modulated speech.
So flew the years, until, one morning came
The heavy sorrow that my wife was dead!
Her death brought her, at once, close to my side—
Brought back the past—gave to my arms again
E'en what it snatched away. The gentle soul
Came over land and sea, swifter than thought—
Came near with all her woman's nobleness,
Her life, her love, her thousand winning ways—
And then again, oh, she was dead! dead! dead!
Alas! of what avail consoling creeds?
That she had ceased to breathe was more to me,
And touched more deeply my humanity,
Than all the inspired teachings of the just!
Weakness?—perchance. Methinks, we are too weak
For the cold comfort of the stolèd priest,
For tears will come in spite of hell or heaven;
And one poor heart that has but ceased to beat,
Can melt our close-grained, vaunted fortitude,
And shame our dried up nature into tears,
Swifter than can the words of shrinèd saints
Or Holy Church divinely eloquent!
Then went I home. An almost scoffing sound
Had that dear word to my most mournful ears.
Yes, home at last, but then, too late! too late!
The bubble of my life, alas, was burst
And all its rosy colours gone to air:
For then, the incommunicable past

Had raised, I found, a barrier unkind
And cruel in its silent, steady growth,
Between my child and me. She scarcely knew,
When I with beating heart pressed her young lips,
And held her in my warm and trembling arms,
That I was her own father—she my child!
Alas, there was a stiffness cold and vague
Between us both that never thawed away;
For never grew the heat of natural love
Reciprocally warm within our breasts.
Her woman's world had grown around her there
By slow degrees, and I, a wanderer
From a dim corner of the vagrant earth,
Came almost with a rude, obtrusive touch
Into her life, that was a garden grown,
Not with mere twigs and tender budding shoots,
But growths deep-rooted, strong, tenacious, fixed.
My friend, I blamed her not, but cursed my fate,
For what I tell was as a drop of gall,
A choking poison curdling up my blood
And numbing all my senses into dim,
Unmoving stupor. Rightly understand;
All things she had for me, and I for her,
Save that most natural and perfected love
Which is the tie for parent and for child,
Woven of strands more finely delicate
Than is the gossamer of summer eves;
For oh! such love is knowledge intimate
Even of things invisible—it meets—
Springs, as it were, to catch the wish halfway,

Ere, clothed in speech, the wish upon the tongue,
Waits hopefully for recognition kind.
A little love! oh, what is human love?
Mere airy breathing—tinkling, hollow words,
A pressure of warm arms and smiling lips,
And lips and arms are dust, and so is love.
And yet, we cannot weigh it, cess it, measure it,
It is not to be bought nor sold for dross,
For though 'tis weak and perishable, still,
Not all the treasuries of crownèd kings
Hold in their coffers its equivalent!
A little love? ah, yes, I tell you, now,
That airy trifle only have I lost,
Or failed to gain in spite of years of hope:
But that, indeed, was all I had to gain,
Or having gained, all that I had to lose,
And missing it—oh, I have lost the world!"

1887.

ILIA.

Once upon a time, a fairy of uncommon beauty, by her sweet voice fascinated the men of the Isle of Man to follow her footsteps, till by degrees she led them into the sea, where they perished. At length a knight-errant resolved on counteracting the charms of the syren; almost in the moment of success she took the form of a wren, and escaped, but she was condemned on every succeeding New Year's Day to re-animate the same form, with the destiny that she must ultimately perish by human hands. (A Garland for the Year. Jno. Timbs, F. S. A.)

PART I.

Long years ago, when in these northern isles
Fairy and fay waxed merry in their wiles;
When all the flowers were haunts of tiny·things
With gauzy, filmy, rainbow-tinted wings,
In all, except their prankish vagaries,
Half-brothers to the bees and butterflies;
When elfin-whispered was the odorous breeze
With love tales of the nymphs, who 'neath the trees,
In amorous dalliance or in sportive play,
Turned Time into a pastoral roundelay,
When Oberon held court beneath the stars,
And to the cadence of melodious bars

Of some bright, fairy, motion-making tune
Danced with his retinue beneath the moon;
There lived, in old Menavia's isle, a maiden,
Whose voice with such a witchery was laden
That, musical as Orpheus or Apollo,
All ears that heard her, loved and longed to follow.
But oh! she was a nymph devoid of pity,
And, kindly-cruel, charmed with some light ditty,
Brave knights and valiant to the marge of ocean,
Till many an one, wrought up to wild emotion
By the keen ravishment her breathing swept
Across his senses, in the waters leapt,
And swam, and swam, while still her voice, above—
Around him, tuned to rich, voluptuous love
Hovered distractingly—until outspent
With the pursuit and Love's hot languishment,
He sank into unfathomed, cold abysses,
And laughter-mocked and maddened by the blisses
His own warm fancy had too rashly seen,
Lay in some ocean valley, soft and green,
With many a slimy shape around his corse I ween!
One eve as Sol's last, lingering look was yet
Tingeing with gold the cloudy coverlet
Of Earth, and while, on gauzy, veinèd pinions,
Rose many a coloured fly from lush dominions
Of marsh, and brook and osier-matted stream
To flutter gaily in the western beam,
Came Ilia to a moss-bound, lucent, cool
And golden-sanded, secret forest pool;
To lave her snowy limbs, unbind her tresses,

Where no rash eye might scan the lovelinesses
Of ripple-vested beauty, and full oft,
She sang a fairy ballad, sweet and soft
That clove th' embowered air, and died away aloft.
Young Rowland, knight, in Mona wandering,
By chance, hard by, heard the fair minstrel sing,
And much he wondered, if from mortal throat
Such heart-awaking, passion-stirring note
Were ever sung; when lo! from out the trees
Came Ilia, bright in sheeny draperies,
Fresh from the bath, her snowy brow serene,
Her cheeks like roses, softly Damascene;
And then she started in a coy confusion,
As Rowland, bending low to disillusion
Her mind of fear, a deep obeisance paid,
And, like a Calidore, his greeting made.
"Fair mortal, if thou be a mortal, I,
By knightly vow, and rules of chivalry,
By the swift instincts of untarnished sires,
By gallantry's most gentle, brave desires,
Am pledged to render all things just and good
Unto the fair estate of womanhood.
Fear not, my steed, my sword, my life, my all
Are loyal vassals to bright Beauty's thrall."
To which the syren, strong in her disguise
Of woman's language, mould and lips and eyes,
Made answer thus: "Sir Knight, thy proffered aid,
To an unfriended and forsaken maid
Most ruthlessly assailed, is joy indeed,
For thou must know, a virtue-wracking need

Compelled me to find sanctuary sweet
In this wave-bounded, forest-grown retreat."
And then, with bosom quickly palpitating,
She is to him a long, long tale, relating
That how her father's court in Cambria held
A villain treacherous whom greed impelled
To seek her hand—to traffic for her love;
The name of marriage holding far above
All true affection; seeking in the form
To find the spirit of those instincts warm
Which are the soul of virtuous chastity;
And how, thus perilled, she afar did flee
To 'scape dishonour, cross the fickle main
With dire forebodings.
                                        To her plaining strain
Young Roland listened, and with head down-bent,
And heart on fire, in spell-bound wonderment
At her bright beauty fell, as in a trance,
'Neath the soft music of her utterance;
While she a thousand amorous schemes divining
In her swift brain to win him, is entwining
The woof and web of coy solicitation,
And building up of her imagination
A blissful, pleasure-bounded future bright
With more than earthly joyance.
                                        Had the knight
Divined her thoughts, how could my rhyme express
The melting thrill of wild deliciousness
That would have trembled through him? He was stirred,
By what he saw, by what he felt and heard,

Into a mutual passion deep and strong—
Oh Beauty, what to thee doth thus belong
That laughs Philosophy away with scorn,
And opening, brighter than the orient morn
Emotion—fancy—every instinct fills
With keen illumination and instils
Such warm, nepenthe-incense through the senses,
That Fame, and Wealth, and all the high pretences
Of proud-pavilioned power, and the sway
That Destiny or Nature gives to clay
Are held at times but as the tiniest prize
Compared with the deep witchery that lies
Within the compass of a woman's eyes?
So thus they passed out of the forest dim
On to a sward rich-carpeted; the rim
Of Dian rose above the tree tops, steeping
The gentle dews that radiant Night was weeping
In argent beams: far off the biliowy sea
Broke with a chant of low monotony
Upon the sandy marge. Then to the swain,
In tones of weary, languishing complain,
Thus spake the nymph—"Fair Sir, mine eyes are dull,
And fain I would that drowsy sleep should lull
My tired limbs to quietude; oh, stay,
Let us await the first young blush of day
Ere we rove farther." Swift then Roland sought
Soft twigs and mosses, and in armfuls brought
Oak leaves, and grasses, and the lady-fern,
And hard by a soft-babbling, crystal burn
Made her a bed, where she, in couchèd ease,

Might dream the night away; and through the trees
He passed and left her, lighted to her slumber
By glowworms, while the stars in countless number
The vault above her brightened. Swift he hied,
And lay beneath a gnarlèd, spreading, wide,
Thick-branchèd oak, till balmy sleep descended,
And nimble-fingered, wayward Fancy ended
His waking consciousness in misty dreams,
Wherein were blended vagabond extremes
Of truth and fable.

Presently there stept
On tiptoe to his couch like weird adept
In arts of conjuration, Ilia, lightly
She breathed, and her round, stealthy arm shone whitely
As Paros marble in the moonlight bland
As reaching forward, with a gentle hand
She placed upon his lips a philtre flower,
From which the fays by some mysterious power
Of incantation drew magnetic juices
That could the delicately-fashioned sluices
Of human passion open wide, and render
The coldest heart so amorously tender,
The chariest lips, scarce ready to express
A common greeting, mad with eagerness
To breathe warm love into the subtle soul
Who thus had spelled them.

Carefully she stole
Back to her leafy nest, her small feet, lightly
Pressing the dew-sprent grass. Enchantress sprightly,
Elf-maiden, fleet-limbed, bright-eyed, rosy lipped!

Now art thou caught as Psyche when she clipt
The arrowy Cupid; thou at last art stricken
With Love's wild ache, that doth thy pulses quicken
Into sharp-fevered throbbings: thou art caught
In that fine web, old Time hath never taught
Our hearts to ware of; for we may be wise,
In axioms, laws and moral sophistries,
But there is music in our every sense,
Waiting the touch of Love's omnipotence,
That shall but feel his plumy wings above
And lo! each sense becomes the sense of love!

PART II.

To sleep in open air, with soft winds playing
Upon your cheek, and odorously straying
Like vestured dreams etherially around
Your head reclining is, as I have found,
A pastoral feast of woodland, keen delight
And breezy thoughts where lifts the soul its flight
To close communion with the stars, and then,
I'll vow old Pan from green Arcadian glen
Never arose more jovially inclined
Than you may do, if but you have the mind
To sleep for once, empirically bent
One summer's night, with the clear firmament
Twinkling above you. This had Roland done,
And a young beam shot from the rising sun
Softly awoke him. Cool the dew was clinging
To flower and grass and tree, above was winging

The joyful lark his solitary flight
When fresh as morning wandered forth the knight
To Ilia's bower.
Shame on all love speeches !
They are ambassadors whose warmth ne'er reaches
The fervour of the thronèd heart, that high
Beating within its palace, bids them try
Their eloquence. Eyes, ye have tongues of gold !
And passion-searching wisdom thousandfold
More skilled in speech than is the real tongue,
If but the poems of our looks were sung !
But that's an if too mighty. What was said
By Roland to fair Ilia were—if read
Methinks but broken sentences—mere words
With scarce the melody of wilding birds
To give them sweetness ; but the downcast gaze,
The rounded cheek, shell-dimpled and ablaze
With burning blushes told that Ilia's joy
Had not a grain of lowering alloy
In its bright goldenness. They had no rites
To seal their vows of conjugal delights,
No priest save Love, no temple save the sky,
No incense save the flowers, no minstrelsy
Of lute, or lyre, or tabor, but the woods
Filled with their feathered, fluttering, painted broods—
The trickling stream—the very winds that blew
Sang music to them—gorgeously new,
Bright, sylvan dreams of happy, happy days
Of dear delight arose before the gaze
Of their rapt fancies !

"Here," said Roland, "we
Within ourselves, will find felicity;
And I will build a bower for thee, sweet,
A verdurous shelter from the noon-day heat;
Thick, rustling ivy, broad and green, and shining,
With honeysuckle creeping up and twining
Its nectared sweetness round thee; violets
And daisies with their fringèd coronets,
And the white bells of tiny valley lilies,
And golden-leaved narcissi—daffodillies
Shall grow around thy dwelling—luscious fare
Of fruits, on which the sun hath laughed; the pear,
Round apples and lush, speckled strawberries,
Purple and golden grapes and bursting cherries
Red as thy lips bright vermil, will I bring
That thou mayst banquet.
I will be the king,
And thou the queen of this our fair domain
We want no courtiers to augment our train
Or add a glare to empery—our throne,
Our sceptre, statutes, customs ours alone."
Thus ended he: but Ilia smiled not; swift
His heart divined an evil. "Love, uplift
Thine own bright eyes to mine." "Alas," she sighed,
"This night, my lord, thou canst not clasp thy bride
In nuptial, fond caresses: look not grieved,
'Tis but a little matter—soon conceived
If thou wilt hear me"
Then with dimpled smiles,
Hope-chastened, doubt-dispelling, she beguiles

Sir Roland to believe that, heedlessly,
She once had vowed a solemn vow, that she
For twice twelve hours before her bridal blisses
Of Love's embracements and delightful kisses
Would pass in lonely vigil: "and 'tis meet,"
Said she, "my lord, that I should well complete
The thing thus careless spoken, for I wis,
Dire treachery and danger-fraught it is
To trifle with the gods; their vengeful powers
Take cognizance of these light slips of ours
And wrack us ruthlessly.
                    This one small boon
I pray thee grant me, and to-morrow's moon
Shall light Love to our chamber."
                    "Go, then, sweet,"
Said Roland, "and to make the hours fleet
I'll to the chase, and with my trusty spear
Seek in the forest some broad-antlered deer
To feast thee with returning."
                    Oh, my numbers!
The heaviness of Earth clogs and encumbers,
The thought of how they parted. Vaguely rose
Amid contending and conflicting throes
Of hope and fear, a shadow in each breast—
A cold, damp, clinging shadow of unrest,
Spirit of thought too dark, too sad to be exprest!

PART III.

There is a clear, fresh spirit daily born
To bless the agèd Earth; her name is Morn;

A child, the veriest, prattling, laughing lisper,
Hath not a voice attuned to so sweet whisper
Of deep-souled secrets; she is pure and wise
In stainless beauties and deep mysteries
Enshrined in opening flowers and dewy stems
Reviving with Night's starry diadems
Still clinging to them! Fine mists fairy-spun
Melting their subtile whiteness in the sun,
And floating, silver threads of gossamer,
And soft, soft winds that delicately stir
Bright petals honey-laden. Grove and brake,
At her bright coming, tremulously wake
Into a chorus of glad, throbbing songs,
And every beauty that to her belongs
Is in a wordless freshness soft enfolden
That, had my muse quaffed the inspiring, golden
Clear fountain of immortal Hippocrene
She were, alas! all powerless, I ween,
With cunning words to faithfully express
The nameless essence of Morn's loveliness!
On such a morn, as I would fain enshrine
Within the measured numbers of my line,
Forth journeyed Roland; but he scarcely noted
Earth's varied beauties, and the mellow-throated
Swift-pinioned songsters sang to him in vain;
His thoughts to Ilia wandered, and his brain
Busied in speculation, lost the sense
Of noting time; a dreamy influence
Led him still on and on: at last, when Sol
Touched the meridian, by a shaded knoll

He stopped, and through the shadowed wood espied
A doe, thin-limbed, sleek-coated, beamy-eyed
Browsing afar—swift he bethought his pledge,
And felt the hunter's instinct whet the edge
Of his strong passion. Prancing steed and houn
Deep-baying till the leafy woods resound
With Echo's plaining—clean-winged falcons jessed,
Fair ladies and gay knights superbly drest
In all the glowing livery of the chase
Were wanting—but young Roland's eager face
Lit yet more eagerly—he moved, alas!
A tinder-twig half hidden in the grass,
Cracked 'neath his feet: oh, shame on woodman's skill,
That it should play our lover-knight so ill!
The doe, with dainty, nervous glance uplift,
Stayed scarce a moment and with motion swift
As passing fancy vanished. On that day,
Full twenty times he saw her far away
Or near at hand, fleeing o'er mead and hollow
With timid swiftness "Follow, follow, follow!"
Weird voices seemed to whisper, and the strength
Of Nimrod fed his energies: at length,
In a green alley where rich creepers wound
In matted thickness on the mossy ground;
Panting and almost breathless, he espied
The fleet thing stumble, joyfully he cried,
And running, drove his sword into her quivering side
Oh, frothy, foaming mouth! Oh, streaming gore!
Oh cruel, cruel wound! Oh, piteous sore,
Weak moaning Now fond lover turn thou blind,

More loathsomely unnatural shape to find
Than this same doe, ne'er filled a mortal's gaze
With petrifying horror and amaze;
For the thin limbs, that erst had sprung so lightly,
Are rounding into human limbs that whitely
Gleam through a sanguine tide! What antlered herds
Yet breathed their mortal agony in words?
Sad human words—alas! no doe is this;
She hath a woman's face, and Roland's kiss,
(For who love-charmèd ever yet was wise?)
Would keep cold Death from off her lips and eyes,
Alas! alas! too late—one quiver, and she dies!
If thou wouldst know whether young Roland's folly
In loving Ilia drove him melancholy,
Or whether he forgot his bride enchanted
In other loves, I know not. Syren-haunted
He may have lived and died; for fay and fairy,
In this prosaic age, are shy and chary
Of telling us their secrets. If upon
Titania and the good King Oberon
I e'er should light, I'll ask them if my tale
They wot of and the answer will not fail
To tell thee, reader. Till that doubtful time,
Let Roland rest in peace in legendary rhyme.

1883

NOTE.—Poetic license is my only authority for introducing a doe in place of a wren; and as the inhabitants of the Isle of Man are more closely concerned than anybody else in the preservation of the legend, I beg to offer them my humble apologies for being the cause of this innocent metamorphosis.

I have, also, for purposes of poetic treatment, placed the action of the poem in a season less severe than that with which our modern New Year's Day is associated.

A DREAM OF LOVE.

INTRODUCTION.

I

There are three states of being in this life
Which we term mortal, each distinct and free;
Each in all woes and happinesses rife,
In love and hate, in subtle sympathy;
In varying change, in dull monotony,
And each, though parted, blended in the strife
Of Mutability.

2

There is the life of years and weeks and days;
The life of Earth which owns the Earth's control;
That goes its thousand, devious, various ways
And leaves the imprint of its mighty whole
On History's broad, deep-written, length'ning scroll;
The life that cold material influence sways
From frozen pole to pole!

3

There is a life whose deep pellucid stream
Of intellectual brightness wanders clear

Into a realm of poesy and dream,
And soaring thought that hardly brooks compeer;
A life whose vast, illimitable sphere
Is blue Infinity—a life we deem
All powers that be revere.

4

There is a life which wakes when dewy Sleep
Keeps watch and vigil o'er our weary eyes;
A life when from Imagination's deep
Troops forth a world of aërial phantasies,
Most wonderful in their quaint mimicries;
So that we mortals love and laugh—ay, weep
When Reason senseless lies!

5

And once a dream came to me in my sleep;
A vision full of exquisite delight;
Delineating things so "true and deep,"
Strange, wild and beautiful that my dull sight
And charmèd memory holds it vivid, bright
As when it passed with silent, solemn sweep
Into the drowsy night!

THE DREAM

I stood, methought, within a garden fair,
And one celestial hovered at my side
Whose speech fell musical upon the air
And into all my being soft did glide.

The round, large moon illumination wide
Flung o'er the scene as we held converse there
On themes my thoughts had ofttimes sanctified
With rapt reflection and with musings strange,
Through many years that have not made me wise,
But in my dream it seemed there came a change,
As though a veil were lifted from my eyes,
And with keen consciousness I did arise
Into a knowledge of a wider range,
As one who long has watched the starry skies
Sees a new planet swim into his ken*
All suddenly.
We talked of Life and Death,
And Love and Passion, and the hopes of men,
And mysteries to which, with bated breath,
Even wisdom comes when low she uttereth
Her speculations thereon.
Gravely then
Said I, "Oh, Spirit, Evil witnesseth
So oft her triumphs in the world that some
Have laughed at Love and Goodness as a dream,
And hold the highest virtues only come
As specious visions, other than they seem,
To unsophisticated souls who deem
These things realities—not deaf nor dumb,
But moving, living, breathing, strong, supreme,
Above all doubt for ever."

* "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken."
Keats.

"Mortal, thou
Shalt see a lady, one of thine own kind,
Who virtue wore upon her spotless brow,
And love within her gentle heart enshrined
So pure, not even calumny divined
A weakness of her. Learn this wisdom now
And hold it ever sacred in thy mind
That, in despite of Sin and all Sin breeds,
There is a soul in this dry frame of Time,
Waiting with faith higher than all the creeds,
The consummation of its hopes sublime.
Despise not thou the hearts that strive to climb,
Above where Custom stands and Doubt impedes
The steep path to the skies. The early prime
Of Love and Goodness is not passed away,
For though the world is touched with strange desires
And aims stupendous, Love will always stay,
Nor change its soul nor quench its ardent fires
Which burn while Time on drooping pinion tires,
Which warm while freezes desolate Decay,
Which shall be bright when Death himself, at last,
expires."
Then straight, methought, we journeyed in the shade
Of a moss-grown and fissured, crumbling wall
With rapid pace. At last the Spirit stayed
His airy motion 'neath a ruined, tall,
And archèd gateway, whose Cimmerian pall
Of shadow fell as though it had been laid
Soft on the closed flowers that were all
A-sleeping in the garden.

'Twas a spot
Of wondrous beauty, round it to the skies
Rose gnarlèd, branch and trunk and twisted knot
Of agèd trees, 'neath whose soft panoplies
The nested birds had hushed their melodies,
And delicately-fronded ferns upshot
Their tapering stems to meet the balmy sighs
And kisses of the moonbeam-girdled night.
And there were sinuous paths and heapèd beds
From which all flowers peered that glad the sight,
Thin, dainty bells that hung their veinèd heads
In spotless purity and blushing reds,
And modest lilies exquisitely white,
And roses veilèd in the silken threads
Of the dew-spangled gossamer, and there
Were tulips pied and folded daisies wet
In mossy shrines of beauty and the air
Was fragrant with the breathing mignonette
And sighing sweetness of the violet;
Oh! 'twas a fairy bower, even where
Queen Mab might hold her revellings and set
Her elfin throne in! Radiantly betwixt
The interlacing foliage chastely fell
The pale, cold moonbeams and their softness mixt
With the clear, beaded dews whose spherical
And lucent eyes sparkled innumerable
As the bright worlds above eternal fixt
By the Supreme and all-creative Will.
Mysterious Night, what beauty hems thee in!
What nameless, solemn glories keenly shine

Through thy stelled sky as peers from Beauty's skin
The changeless soul etherially fine!
And Night the changeless loveliness is thine
Of the clear-voicèd stars that blend within
Their shimmering rays th' eternal ray Divine!
Warm Day's calm sister soft thy brooding wing
Hangs o'er the orbèd Earth, as 'neath thy shade,
We mortals drink of Sleep's Lethean spring,
And dream away the sorrows Care hath frayed
In waking life, which, like a thin fine braid,
Hems round the vasty, all-encompassing,
Bright vesture of Eternity, till staid
And hoary Age or swift untimely Death
Chafes it away for ever!

In my dream
Thus thought I, as we sometimes muse beneath
An azure sky or by a phantom stream,
Or in some airy glade that Fancy's beam
Illumes quiescence with, when wandereth
Her lightning-wingèd immaterial team
Unreined through lidded slumber.

Silently
Methought, we passed across a bladed lawn
And came unto a mansion rearing high
Its frontage to our gaze. 'Twas old and worn
That I could note—the night breeze blew forlorn
Upon it; and although I knew not why,
I felt a sadness in my bosom born
Even as I surveyed it. A mere latch
Fastened the oaken door—one step, and we

Had crossed the ancient threshold. I did catch
No sound, and in my dream it seemed to me
The house was tenantless : I could not see,
In the prevailing darkness, if the watch
Of careful hands and eyes had ceased to be
Visible in the hundred various ways
Which garb with life the meanest cottage wall,
But if forgot are omens.
Through the haze
Of the pent air—across the silent hall,
Our way we wended—mute and still was all,
Save the shy echo following in the maze
Of our swift flight and my lone footsteps' fall.
And rapidly ascended we a flight
Of slanting stairs, and reverently stept
Into a chamber flooded by the light
Of the unclouded moon, whose glances swept
The form of one who solitary slept;
I gazed upon the sleeper, and my sight
Was dimmed with tears—I knew not why I wept.
"Oh, Mortal," spake the Spirit, "weep not thou,
For she on whom thou gazest hath to-day
Been welcomed by the angels : even now,
Ere the dissolving tenement of clay
Shrinks into dissolution and decay,
Come spirit forms to hover round the brow
Where Love and Faith enthronèd sate alway.
She was a lady on whom life's young dawn
Flushed like the day, when from night's fleeing shade,
On fragrance-wafting pinions are upborne

The spicy hours. Never gentler maid
Was by great Nature's moulding touch pourtrayed
In shape of woman; all that could adorn
Her sex had Heaven in profusion laid
Like some rare cloak upon her, and she seemed
A flower too lovely for the world's rough gales
To spend their wrath upon.
Thou wouldst have deemed,
Hadst thou but seen her then, that old world tales
Of sylvan nymphs and dryad-haunted dales,
Were not mere splendid fictions, idly dreamed
By raptured bards in Greece's classic vales.
Her glowing light of love and gladness fell
From her like sunbeams, or the breathing scent
Of flowers, or the music of a well
Whose waters drip most tunefully; it went
Straight to the heart—a peerless ornament,
Diffusing over all she did a spell
Rarely conferred, most subtly eloquent.
Such natures are like genius, which bestows
Part of itself upon the humblest theme
It loves to handle, but reserves its throes
Of fine-wrought passion and its brightest gleam
Of heaven-born instinct for some darling dream
That lies, with folded wings, in light repose
Deep i' the brain, till the quick, wandering beam
Of inspiration wakes it from its trance
To sleep for nevermore.
No purer eyes
E'er gazed on woman with the lightning glance

Of strong, devoted love than did the wise
And noble Thurio, on her who lies
Now withered from the full luxuriance
Of youthful Beauty's blooming witcheries.
And he and she, like two clear streamlets bright,
Melodiously running side by side,
Had, in the confluence of Love's delight,
Merged their two natures in one happy tide;
But Fate's course-turning boulder, scarce espied,
In life's fair morning, loomed with envious height,
And swift for aye their channels did divide.
Young Thurio was a soldier, and he went
Whither ensanguined, patriot glory led,
The act was hallowed by the high intent
That Freedom shall survive, though there be shed
A nation's blood ere Tyranny's crowned head
Fall from its loathsome, fell disfigurement
Of Empire and authority.

He sped
Across the seas: the full and lessening sail
That bore him from his Lady-love was scanned,
Until her eyes, like two tired birds did fail
Their arrowy flight, and in her moist, white hand
Outwept her heart's deep sadness. Love seemed banned,
And Hope grew wan, and spiritless and pale
As wearily within her native land
She waited news of Thurio. It came
Sharp as the thrust that, with calamitous
And horrid swiftness, gave a hero's name
To her young lover, who fell glorious

In the resounding, multitudinous
Red frontage of grim war."
"Oh, what is Fame,"
Cried she, "that one so dear should perish thus?
Is the mere blazoned heraldry of deeds
Which serve to wake some wandering minstrel's strain,
More precious than the valorous youth which bleeds
Stark, gashed and silent on the blood-red plain—
Must all be given that Freedom may remain?"
"Yet deem her not too selfish—life hath seeds
That blossom once, and never bloom again.
Such love was hers, but after that wild burst
Of passionately tender sorrow died,
Even as some cloud that weeps away the thirst
Of the parched Earth, when Sirius doth ride
Fierce in his car, refined and purified,
Beamed out her wealth of goodness, safely nurst
Through blighted love and hopes dissevered wide.
And she did consecrate her youthful years,
Her life, her wealth to all things kind and good;
Full oft her voice hath stayed the mourner's tears,
Full oft her hand hath given the hungred food;
And she had charmed the sufferer's solitude,
Making sweet music in his weary ears,
Till Pain hath fled, by Love and Hope subdued.
And Age stole on her like the gentlest frost
That silvers Winter's chill, contracting day,
Time's wrinkling hand upon her forehead lost
Part of its cunning, and a calm decay
Wore life, and strength and loveliness away

So quietly that her pure spirit crossed
Life's boundary as softly as the ray
Of some clear star which, in the lucent wave,
Reflected shines"
"Her simple tale is told,
And soon, the pageantry which to the grave
Escorts life's senseless clay will have unrolled
Its ebon train—but, ere Earth shall enfold
In its damp clasp the crumbling dust it gave,
Thou child of sad mortality—Behold!"
A calm-faced spirit, beautiful and fleet,
And bright-enraimented as Lucifer,
Descended and approached with twinkling feet,
And hovered o'er the closèd lips of her
Whom Thurio loved, then mild as airs that stir
June's scarce blown roses passed with noiseless beat
Like some devout and flame-girt worshipper.
Then came there one with silvery radiance lit,
Like to the brightness of a waning star,
When in the pale, clear morn the sun doth sit
Enthronèd on his life-awaking car;
Diffusing over Earth and Sky afar
The beaming essence of the Infinite,
From Love's pure springs which all eternal are.
"Fair ruin of mortality," cried he,
"Thou once wast one of Earth's divinest things,
And loved through life and through eternity,
Is thy pure spirit that with rapid wings,
Swift as the brain's most keen imaginings
Is flown—Oh whither?—would that I might be

The guide and sharer of its wanderings!
But we shall meet at last, and never more
Shall Death, or Sin, or Chance, or Destiny
Bid us unlearn the bright, celestial lore
That lit the darkness of mortality;
Love, like its mighty Author, cannot die,
Life springs from Death, but lovelier than before,
A soaring soul of fadeless purity!"
And like an indeterminate, pale mist,
Or like a fading rainbow, softly dyed
In hues of gold and red and amethyst,
My dream dissolved, whilst on my ear did glide
A sweetly joyful and exultant tide
Of melody, whose eloquence I wist,
Might with a seraph's utterance have vied.

Voice (singing).

The beauty of the flower when it fadeth is not dead,
But in memory remaineth,
As the rosy light which staineth
The glittering pavilion of the sky when day is fled
In the west;
And the gentle, loving goodness of the Earth can never die,
But like a spirit wingeth
Its flight from Death and singeth,
"I am portion of the loveliness that from Eternity
Bringeth rest,
And hope and peace and gladness to the breast."

"And incorporally blending with the fading things of Earth,
I clothe them with a brightness,
And, on wings of airy lightness,
I lift them in their sorrows, and their happiness, and mirth
Far above
The thraldom of corruption, till there falleth on their ears,
Coming near and ever nearer,
Growing clear and ever clearer
The music of the voices that are singing in the spheres,
And they move
Kindred spirits, in the spirit world of Love."

And lightly I awoke, the early sun
Bright through the lattice stole with cheerful beam,
Long since the birds their carols had begun,
Long since the mist had rolled from off the stream;
The day was reigning gloriously supreme,
And as I gazed the smiling Earth upon,
I wondered if my dream were all a dream.

1881.

CHELSEA JANIE.

A Tale.

PART I.

Where Chelsea's ancient, brick-built fane
O'erlooks the winding walk of Cheyne,
With squarely-moulded Norman tower,
And clock that chimes the passing hour;
With many a tomb, and many a tale
Enclosed within its sacred pale,
Where old association's tether,
Joins many a year o' life together,
Where Thames's rolling tide is borne,
Where sometime flourished gay Cremorne;
Where London's grim and smoky city
'Gins to grow rustic, quaint and pretty,
There lived the lives who gave my muse
A subject for my pen to use,
And from the theme I'll strive to borrow
Its strain of pathos and of sorrow;
For Fate with cunning hand outwove
A tale of sadness leagued with love,
And bound in many a devious skein
A father's wrath, a daughter's stain,
A lover's sin untimely fashioned,
To breed in maiden's hearts impassioned

The treacherous worm of cankering care,
Which blasts the blossom sweet and fair,
Nor stirs, but aye, devouring, creeping,
Till every root is fed by weeping.

Old Robin Hearne was hale and strong,
Though Time for many a season long
Had waited like a kind dependent
Upon him gentle and attendant.
He owned no wealth of worldly gear,
Save that for which he'd laboured here,
And labour ne'er had hurt his fame,
But crowned him with an honest name.
Sure many a prince, with many a title,
Might envy him a meed so little,
And yet so full of what mankind
Oft strives to gain though fails to find
In those whom Fortune, wild and fickle,
Wills even Death's relentless sickle,
To gild the very life it snaps
And glitter o'er the grave's mishaps.
For he was honest in his station,
Beyond his outward reputation,
Though somewhat moody and reserved,
Yet still a sterling name deserved.
Perchance, he mourned, though outward gay,
The darling of an earlier day,
For Rob had dearly loved and cherished
A wife, though all but love had perished
Long years ago, yet sorrow's tears

Had blest him with a daughter's years,
In blithe and buxom, bonnie Janie,
A lass who could compare with any.
Sure never yet a maiden's tongue
Such music to a father sung,
She was his pride of toil and leisure,
His pearl beyond all price or measure.
For her he bore the summer's heat,
And dreary winter's frost and sleet;
For her he planned and laboured ever,
With joy in every fresh endeavour,
Nor recked he if his frame grew tired,
Hers was the welfare he desired,
She was the trust that gaily brightened
Each care and ev'ry hardship lightened.
To see his stalwart frame o'erbowed
As down the Thames his barge he rowed,
To see him homeward journey weary,
But still for all with glance right cheery,
And own his day's best happiness
In Janie's fond caress and kiss;
To know the plans his fancy built him,
Alas! but Fancy meant to jilt him,
For man's best schemes oft Fate ordains
When fertile most in plots and pains,
Shall fade before some dire mischances,
Ne'er seen by his most anxious glances.

Now Janie loved, as maidens will,
Without a thought of boding ill,

For youth is rife to swift engender
The passion beautiful and tender,
Without a care for storms unkind
On Life's horizon dim defined,
In the mere cloudlet unsuspicious,
That dimly specks the sky capricious;
Or as the bud to Zephyr's sigh
In spring will ope its leaves to die,
When Boreas from the north's bleak bosom
Nips off the young and eager blossom;
Or as the snowflake's beauty pure
In muddy thaw can ne'er endure;
Or as the dewdrop silver-beaded,
For which the heart of Flora pleaded,
Can ne'er withstand old Sol's bright gleam
But shrinks 'neath his devouring beam;
So Janie loved with passion youthful,
Nor recked her heart of tongues untruthful,
Nor thought she that a lover's smile
Concealed so much of faithless guile;
For Love lent all his sweet infection,
To rosy tinge her heart's subjection
With such a thrill of gentle joy,
That sure it brooked no care's alloy,
But like some fabulous enchainer,
Or like some angel entertainer,
Bound every sense and every care
In bondage so supremely fair,
So full of timid, winsome graces,
And tender vows and soft embraces,

So bright with future hopes of bliss,
Sealed by a promise or a kiss,
That Janie loved, as many a maiden,
With many a grace and virtue laden,
Has loved, alas ! full oft before
To e'en the strength of Love deplore,
And e'en the trust of Love's fair keeping
Find merged in shame and endless weeping.
Ah ! Love what influence prompts the heart,
To thus reject thy purer part ?
What subtle power instilled can quicken
A flame at which our natures sicken ?
Why is the voice so sweet to sing,
Oft but a cruel lure to bring
Our souls to piteous travailing,
Our lives a mark for censure's railing ?
The question sure is hard to tell,
And many a seer has pondered well
Why human love is linked with folly,
In union sad and melancholy,
And shall my untutored numbers strive
A hasty answer to contrive,
How Passion's ardent nature reaches
Beyond what pure discretion teaches ?
And shall I struggle to assign
Which first o'ersteps the boundary line
By rigid Virtue made explicit,
O'ermastering love or rove illicit ?
Let Purity condemn the deed
I mourn the sin—I mourn the meed

And only know that Janie blindly,
Met Love and loved him all too kindly!

Keen blew the blast as Janie prest
Her tender offspring to her breast,
As to her home remorseful turning,
With anguished shame and sorrow burning;
With pallid cheek and tearful eye,
And many a thought of days gone by,
She passed the well remembered places,
The shops and old familiar faces,
With many a thought of how to name
To Rob the story of her shame.
Now swift she nears his humble dwelling,
A thousand doubts her course impelling,
And with a timid, trembling clutch,
A half convulsive, shuddering touch,
She smote the door and anxious waited,
With throbbing heart and breathing bated.
One moment—Robin gazed upon her,
His Janie, but his sad dishonour.
"Father!" the trembling girl outspoke,
Whilst swift her sobs convulsive broke,
As though her very heart was riven,
"Father! I come to be forgiven."

PART II.

Stern was the look on Robin's face,
And dark the frown on Robin's brow,

For brooding Care had left her trace
Upon his swarthy visage now.
"Girl," spake the father, but his tone
Was linked with trembling sorrow's strain,
"Since thou dishonour's seed hast sown
Thou thus must reap dishonour's stain;
Since Love hath weaned thee from my side,
Make Love the portion of thy heart,
Since thou my fondest hopes belied,
Thou must unblest from me depart.
Oh! how I loved thee, how I framed
For thee a thousand plans of bliss,
And thus thou every wish hast shamed,
And marred Affection's page by this;
Then go, my heart to thee is dead,
Reap the full measure of thy sin,
Forgiveness from my heart is fled,
So deep the scar that sears within!"
Cold, cruel words, on Janie's ear
They fell as falls the withering blight
That blasts the timorous blossom sere
In one unkind, unhappy night;
For oh! so fondly had she reared
Forgiveness o'er her soul's mistrust,
Nor heard the whisper that she feared,
Nor conscience self-accusing thrust,
But cherished Hope with dear despair,
And banished with a wild disdain
The merest shadow of a care
That whispered intercession vain.

Her woman's heart had framed the deed,
And her repentant spirit pressed
To thus her sire's forgiveness plead
And sink forgiven on his breast.
But Janie, Janie, shield thee now
Against the gloom despair compels,
For never can the soul avow
The substance which the shade foretells.
What heeds she now the biting wind
That howls around her slender form?
There wars a tempest more unkind
Than winter's most avenging storm
Within her outraged woman's breast—
Within her eye of frenzied fire—
Within her frame that seeks no rest
But wanders on nor seems to tire.
'Twould take a subtler pen than mine,
More versed in misery's tangled skein,
Her woe to faithfully untwine
And prove the madness of her brain.
Oh! Janie, Janie, canst thou pray,
For never yet more need hadst thou
To drive the shadowy fiend away
Whose soft enticement tempts thee now.
But coldly gleam the shimmering stars,
And ere the night is older grown,
A soul has burst its prison bars
To wander in the weird unknown!

* * * *

Right gaily shone the moon's bright beam,

And streaked the Thames with silver light,
As Robin voyaged down the stream,
And left old Chelsea out of sight;
And many a sad reflection filled
The sweep of Contemplation's strain,
For Janie's pleading accents thrilled
His bosom with remorseful pain,
And though he waived the tender thought
With many a stern resolve aside,
Affection's quivering cadence sought
To soothe his honour and his pride,
And down his rugged cheek there stole
A teardrop glistening as the dew,
Wrung from the anguish of his soul
That wildly thrilled him through and through.
And swift came back with soft'ning grace,
A thousand thoughts of erring Jane,
Once more he saw her childhood's face,
Once more she climbed his knees again,
Once more he watched her winsome smile,
And heard her merry laughter ring,
So fair did memory beguile
The hour of his sorrowing;
Nor dwelt on her unhappy rove,
But whispered recollections fair,
Her youth, her beauty, and her love
Without a darker shadow there.
And musing thus old Robin's barque,
At length, came gliding slowly down,
Where Vauxhall's arches drear and dark

O'er many an eddy fling their frown:
And far ahead he dim descried
A tiny speck that rose and fell
In Thames's black and sullen tide
And rolling wavelets' surging swell,
And nearer, nearer, he advanced,
While large and larger to his eye
Grew the wee thing at which he glanced
With apprehensive scrutiny:
And nearer yet, and larger still,
Until his barge alongside grazed,
And with a sickening, horrid thrill
He bent him down and nearer gazed,
And with a mighty effort clutched
The floating burden dark and dim,
Good heavens! what the form he touched?
And what the dread that mastered him?
He could not look, but blindly knelt,
And o'er the face so wet and cold
His horny hands all trembling felt,
And they the horrid story told.
Then half afraid, as though the clay,
Despoiled of life's enlivening flame,
Would move or speak, he strove to pray
But only uttered Janie's name.
Yes, there she was, her matted hair
Athwart her blue-veined bosom clung,
The heart so frail, the flower so fair.
The life so treasured wrecked so young:
And closed for aye the sparkling eyes

That made the heart of Rob rejoice,
And hushed the anguish of her sighs
And music of her woman's voice,
And over such a sad career,
So brief, so chequered and so frail,
Let Pity shed a glistening tear,
And meek-eyed Mercy tell the tale!

Where free the breath of heaven blows,
And many a songster blithely sings,
Where many a flower wildly grows,
And ne'er an adverse memory clings,
There rears a tiny, sculptured stone,
Its lowly head amongst the many,
And where its humble shade is thrown,
Sleep Robin Hearne and Chelsea Janie.

1880.

THE STAR SPIRIT.

A Fairy Tale.

I

No wealth of fable, no historic story,
No classic legend of the olden time,
When high Olympian gods were in their glory,
And Saturn gave to Earth her golden prime;
No glowing tale of Ind's voluptuous clime,
No theme of gallants brave, and ladies gay,
No Calidore in courtesy sublime,
Shall charm the ear to listen to my lay,
A simple, homely tale of a maiden of to-day.

2

She was not beautiful; no Attic graces
Stamped her a nymph of unterrestrial birth—
No child with one of those clear starlight faces
That laugh and gleam upon the sunny Earth
In all the happy thoughtlessness of mirth;
Disease had shrunk young Nature's springing mould,
And Pain and Want had blasted Beauty's worth,
Yet her wild eyes were wondrous to behold
Twin living orbs of Love 'neath elfin braids of gold

3

A wan, weak, tiny, helpless, city maiden,
Who ne'er had strayed beyond great London's bound,
To roam the meadows with their joys enladen,
But as the dreary, dreary year went round,
Lay mute and still with childish sorrow crown'd ;
And from her window watched the hurrying feet,
And listened to the roaring, rushing sound
Of the full life that, in the busy street,
Passed by like some broad stream, wierd, wonderful and fleet.

4

Deep thoughts like unblown blossoms lie within
The swelling seed of childhood's tender mind ;
To little Alice, from the city's din,
Came voice and language, and the stars, that shined
Bright through her casement, spake in accents kind,
Until the child, so fragile-limbed would dream,
Some wondrous love in those clear orbs was shrined
As if a spirit robed in angel gleam
Watched over her, so fair their loveliness did seem.

5

There are some things whose very evanescence
Kindles our best and brightest sympathies ;
The morning star whose paling incandesence
Melts languid when old Helios doth arise—
The glittering arch that spans the storm-rent skies,
The beaded dew that, on the silken rose,

Sinks, trembles, glitters, languishes and dies
The first, wild, rapturous, burning kiss that glows
On lips whose mutual love no language dare disclose.

6

All these are beautiful, so swiftly fragile,
One golden moment sweeps the charm away,
Be fond Philosophy a sprite as agile
As Puck, he cannot bid the essence stay
Which permeates the common things of clay,
And like a potion of Medean might
Or like some fleeting, keen Promethean ray
Thrills the warm heart, and ravishes the sight
In one harmonious burst of exquisite delight.

7

There are some lives so fleeting, that we love them,
They have, alas ! so little time to know
How brightly Heaven smiles for aye above them,
How richly Earth is raimented below ;
For them the keen, intoxicating flow
Of youthful spirits, healthy, fresh desires
Scarce brims the trembling heart, before its glow
Of liquid lights and love-enkindled fires,
In Death's cold shadow pales and tearfully expires.

8

All this the mother of the maiden felt,
Whene'er she gazed into her darling's eyes,
Or sadly by the humble bed-side knelt,

And prayed for grace and wisdom to be wise,
That she might render calmly to the skies,
When noiseless Death all shadowy should descend
To claim resistless, as his lawful prize,
The fluttering life she loved so well to tend
With care that never failed, and love that knew no end.

9

And Alice lay and watched the gleaming stars,
And wove bright fancies from their silver rays,
Till her young spirit soared beyond the bars
Of the weak flesh, and almost seemed to gaze
A kindred spirit, with a kindred blaze
Of piercing light into the far-off dim,
Deep secrets of the planetary maze,
And heard in fancy, rise the raptured hymn
Of martyr and of saint, of seer and cherubim.

10

And of a certain star that nightly dipped,
Its clear refulgence thwart her window-pane,
She fashioned a bright lady, rosy-lipped
And beautiful as sunshine blent with rain,
Half angel and half fairy, without stain ;
Who when the mother's good-night kiss caressed
To drowsy sleep the wonder-working brain,
Stole down, and bending brightly o'er her nest,
Soft kissed the poor pale lips to smiles the loveliest.

11

And woo'd the young, young soul of little Alice
With radiant dreams to heaven, even as though

Her lips had pressed the rim of some strange chalice,
Whose pleasing vintage they might not forego,
So fresh the draught, in its keen amber flow,
And bubbling strength the body to inflame
With gentle heat, enfranchising from woe,
And from all things that bear a woful name,
The sensitive young mind, the anguish-stricken frame.

12

And thus, one morn they found her, with a smile
Guarding the ivoried closure of her breath,
Like some bright sentinel that held the while.
A gentle parle of fellowship with Death,
And as the mother weeps, full oft she saith,
" My little one is fled, the lady bright,
Of whom even now it seems she chattereth,
Hath come with witchery and beauty dight,
And kissed her soul away in the stillness of the night!"

1882.

TRUTH AND BEAUTY.

I

In the first days when sin, and death, and tears
Had not yet dimmed the light of young creation,
When Earth, the latest fashioned of the spheres,
Glowed in the rays of Love's illumination;
When Hope not menaced by a thousand fears
Smiled strong in faith and happy meditation,
There moved two glorious spirits upon earth,
Of mortal shape, and unterrestrial birth.

2

They were coeval with all things that are,
And with Eternity were co-eternal,
Bright visitants to Earth's scarce peopled star,
Twin sisters of an origin supernal;
Among things lovely, they were lovelier far,
And in the midst of freshness, bright and vernal,
Where'er they trode, there sprang beneath their feet
Blossoms and odours beautiful and sweet.

3

But when men's hearts grew cold, and sin and shame
Spread from fair Eden unto mighty Babel,

When Hate had lit his peace-destroying flame,
And murder sprang from out the blood of Abel,
When Innocence had lost her virgin name,
And spotless Love had pined into a fable,
They say that Truth and Beauty faded then
From the accustomed haunts and ways of men.

4

They could not die, nor knew they of decay,
Though they had dissolution oft beholden;
Themselves, immutable, unchanged alway,
For ever growing old and never olden,
Like youth's warm love whose spirit-kindling ray
'Is always bright, and beautiful, and golden,
And younger, and yet older than the hearts
Into whose depths Promethean fire it darts.

5

Some said they fled into dark, sylvan caves,
And some averred that, by mysterious powers,
They lived in peace beneath old Ocean's waves,
In pearly grots and weed-engirdled bowers;
And others whispered that their fragrant graves
Were the soft silken bosoms of the flowers,
Into whose essences their natures sighed
Themselves away for ever to abide.

6

Then the young dynasties of Earth arose,
Egypt and Babylon, and line Chaldean;

Within the land where old Euphrates flows,
Rude Art first struck her labour-tunèd pæan,
And Knowledge waking with a Titan's throes,
O'er Caucasus and o'er the blue Ægean,
Sped into Hellas with a thousand charms;
A glowing bride for Freedom's sturdy arms.

7

And by degrees, men yearned to know again,
And strove to find with every grace unhidden,
The beautiful and long-forgotten twain,
Which they from off the earth had ruthless chidden;
But the quick fancy of the teeming brain,
Whose merest wish ne'er seemed to be forbidden,
Ne'er lighted on the place, nor knew the spot,
But ever seeking, ever found them not.

8

And to the vague abstractions of the mind,
The poets and the sages gave a being;
Creating virtues after their own kind,
And gods and goddesses in love agreeing—
Such life-endowed mythologies designed,
Until men half believed that they were seeing,
In Tempe's and in Arcady's bright vales,
The flesh-clothed fancies of their dreaming tales.

9

And sculptors sought in marble to express
The subtle forms which stirred their brains' conception,

And painters vied to limn the loveliness
That kindled in their minds the strong affection
For things no sophistry could ever guess;
Nor tint, nor tone, nor shadow, nor complexion
Could ever blend into a perfect whole,
With voice and motion, light and love and soul.

10

Yes, they had passed beyond the grosser sight,
Passed with the days of Life's first glad upspringing,
Passed with the anthems of the sons of light,
Passed with the morning stars' triumphant singing,
When Earth was angel-trodden and the bright,
Clear tones of seraphs in men's ears were ringing:
And thus, alas! 'mid sin and woe and pain
Men found them not, nor gazed on them again.

11

But Time, and Death, and Love made man more wise,
And to a holier knowledge did awaken,
The scales that long time dimmed his anxious eyes,
At last grew loose, and were at last offshaken.
The stars, the seas, the valleys, and the skies
Had to themselves a solemn language taken;
And whispered that the gentle spirits fair
Were round him on the earth, and in the air.

12

On the high hills and in the busy plains,
And in the silent forests' green recesses,

And in the snows, the sunshine, and the rains,
And kindly deeds, and smiles, and fond caresses;
And in the music of Love's thrilling strains,
In graceful limbs, bright eyes and sheeny tresses;
And in the wit and wisdom of the tongue,
And in the silver laughter of the young.

13

And permeating all things far apart,
Kindling the fires of suns and constellations,
And waking all emotions of the heart,
And lighting up the soul's imaginations;
And hallowing every good and gentle art,
Bright ministers of Love's pure ministrations;
In words and shapes and all created things,
And gentle deeds and pure imaginings.

14

And now we know that they can never fade,
Nor can their mystic union e'er be broken,
They are the souls of all that God hath made,
And theirs the speech which He from aye hath sp
In them and by them all things are arrayed;
And they the type, the symbol, and the token
In Earth and Heaven and all the worlds above,
Of the great spirit of universal Love.

1881.

THE BEGGAR'S ARBITRATION.

Two witlings, crammed from crown to toe,
With all that college could bestow,
Once strove in argument to show
　　　　Which man perchance is wiser;
He who spends all he hath below,
　　　　Or he who lives a miser.

"Now think," said one, "the want of sense
Must be in mortal man immense,
Who profligate of all expense
　　　　Of character or pocket,
Burns life for Pleasure's consequence
　　　　Clean down into its socket.

"And by each grade of want descends,
E'en at the rate by which he spends,
From affluence to the sterile ends
　　　　Of Poverty's dominion,
To forfeit all the hopes of friends,
　　　　And ev'ry good opinion.

"Nay, even more, the moral stain
Of Guilt waits on Profusion's train,

When neither bridle, bit nor rein,
Of meliorate Discretion
Is used to compass and restrain
The mad, unchecked progression."

"That's not the point," the other cries,
"We came not here to moralize,
The wisdom, not the guilt, applies
To our dissertation;
Waive Sin's vexed question to the skies
For future condemnation."

"But, sir, I fain would calmly teach,
That he his wisdom doth impeach,
Who thus commits so sad a breach
Of laws, whose penal toke
The rash transgressor e'en will reach,
As sure as they are broken."

"Zounds!" cried the other, "what avail
For you at Pleasure's creed to rail,
Man by his actions tells the tale
Of life, and if he jolly,
Laugh down the wave and scorn the gale
Of dim-eyed Melancholy;

"Canst thou with Censure's biting jeer,
And frigid Affectation's sneer,
Pretend to hold existence here
As something to be stinted

Of joys whose outlines disappear
As quickly as imprinted?

"Look on the wretch who niggard gropes
Penurious o'er his sordid hopes,
Where ne'er a virtue interlopes
To thwart his gold's espial;
Sure his mean soul is bound with ropes
Of sinful self-denial?

"Who spends his energies and years
In barren toils and furtive fears,
Nor weeps but when Affliction's tears,
In horrible abortion,
Fall for the god his soul reveres,
And worships by contortion.

"And what the end of ev'ry scheme,
What the awaking of a dream
Bathed in the cold, delusive gleam
Of grasping, hard cupidity?
Nought but a proof his studied theme
Is based on rank stupidity.

"For votary at the shrine upraised,
By avaricious yearnings crazed,
Unblest, unsorrowed and unpraised,
Grim Death claims expiation,
And flings his riches to each dazed
And litigant relation."

Thus wagged their tongues, though neither bent
In meek, unqualified assent,
To others furious argument,
But not a jot relented,
Each vowed with temper well-nigh spent
The other was demented.

At last, because in vain they strove,
Each proposition right to prove,
They 'greed to sink their hate or love
By arbitration curious,
Vested in whomsoe'er should rove
Where waxed the contest furious.

Patience not long was taxed to wait,
For soon with happy, careless gait,
A beggar jogged towards them straight,
Most scantily a'tattered,
With ne'er a hat to grace his pate
And rags with mud bespattered.

"Hold!" cried they both—the beggar stared—
"Good man, be not too quickly scared,
We thus your halt have rudely dared
For mutual satisfaction,
And you shall own your time well spared
If you'll end our distraction."

And thus, without more parley, they
Proceeded the vexed point to lay,

Which faith! had cost them half the day
And still remained unravelled;
Each waiting for the beggar's say,
Belated and betravelled.

"Sirs," quoth the knave, "I can't unscroll
How far extends from either pole,
The space wherein we mortals roll
Upon this fickle planet,
Nor can Imagination's soul
Nor calculation span it.

"And if you'd know how near allied
To wisdom is the foolish pride
That tempts to waste or prompts to hide
Wealth's fair and golden dower,
Why I'll avow that you've applied
A task beyond my power.

"For never yet have I been blest,
The truth is candidly confessed,
With what your heroes have possessed
For argument's diversion;
My fortune never has transgressed
Beyond a groat's aspersion.

"And as Dame Fortune never gave
Me wealth to spend or wealth to save,
That which I ne'er had luck to have
Through Poverty's lean curses,

For me may line a miser's grave,
Or burn a spendthrift's purses.

"Yet stay—if Wisdom is the cry,
How near the two extremes are nigh?
Why faith! I'll do my best to try
The dubious point to settle;
Though sure the question's much too high
For my unlettered mettle."

And speaking thus, the fellow sought
A pause in meditative thought,
Then round, as though with wisdom fraught,
He turned and thus addressed 'em,
And, as his words were somewhat short,
I've truthfully expressed 'em.

"He's never wise who reckless spends,
Or hoards what God in goodness sends,
And, as each vicious habit tends
To things most melancholy,
They're both great fools by different ends,
And equal in their folly."

1880.

ODE TO NATURE.

Thou universal Mother, purest, best
Of all things understood by mind of man,
Of all things named in speech and set in song,
Or woven in the memories of Time!
Thou only Beautiful! Thou only True!
Wisdom Eternal and Eternal Love!
Calm Influence that mockest my poor tongue,
Too weak an instrument to bear the thought,
Which, like a child in the dull brain's dim womb,
Striving for entrance to this present world;
Would fain to Thee, even as a child newborn,
Turn for dear solace, comfort, and repose!
Oh! wake Thou me to know Thee, Mother mine,
For I am even as this passing thought
Now come to full conception in the brain;
And must be born out of my former self,
And must drink wisdom from thy mighty life,
And rest within thy bosom or be cast,
Shrunken and starved, to premature decay!
Fain would I live and feed on truth and love,
For I have yearned for Truth in darksome days,
And sighed for Love in doubt and bitter tears,
But found them not where most I hoped to find,

In glances kind and speech articulate,
And hearts attuned to sympathies which should,
Like the sweet notes of some grand instrument,
Each in its various tone be true and pure:
And so, I turned for solace to the plains,
The skies, the valleys, and the wandering streams,
The stars, the flowers, and the songs of birds,
The floating clouds, and winds most musical
Antheming happiness through branches green.
All these fair things and many more to me
Have spoken something echoed not among
The dry philosophies of sages grave,
And joyless dogmas of Religions old;
But Truth and Love in man I have not found,
Only dark, fearful thunders of despair,
And creeds all hedged around with vengeance dire,
And lies and hollow semblances of Truth—
Hate, garbed in the hypocrisy of Love,
Coming officiously with solemn mien,
Branding the babe with a dark stain of sin,
And breathing out fierce prophecies of Hell!
Oft have I brooded in deep sadness bowed,
Asking myself why man's perfected life,
The outcome of gradations infinite,
Embodying in itself all other lives,
Should have been libelled as a tainted thing,
Less perfect in its beauty, goodness, truth,
Than the rank weed we tread beneath our heel?
For this poor weed is perfect, lacking naught,
Its every attribute and function here

Blending in so complete a harmony
With the surroundings of its native soil,
That all the winds as softly visit it,
And it is nourished by the rains and dews,
Cheered by the sun and shined on by the stars,
As is the lily delicately fair
It might have been, 'tis true, a lovely flower
Instead of what it is—a common weed—
And if there be gods in the boundless realm
Of sleeping nature, man might have been god,
As perfect god as he is perfect man.
But can the weed become a glowing rose ?
Or can the rose put on the skylark's wings ?
Or can the skylark merge into the child ?
And shall the child, that swift becomes a man,
From manhood change his nature and become
An unterrestrial, immaterial soul ?
So inconceivable that if he dare
To bring his reason serious, mature,
To this large question of his heart and brain,
He will shrink back and wonder wherefore grew
And whence came all these sickly phantasies,
Making him other than a natural man ;
And blinding him with their black cloudiness,
To simple happiness and great desires,
And the true life that deep within him lies.

1886.

LOVE AND DEATH.

A Fragment.

Into a valley green, and broad, and fair,
Whither the foot of man had never trode,
One day stole Death with solemn pace and slow:
But all his armoury was laid aside,
And only like an olden god looked he,
Of peaceful arts and wisdom passing man's.
There was a mild benignity of mien
In his large, stately port, and in his eyes,
That gazed contemplative upon the sward,
Deep love celestial with clear radiance shone.
Grave was his face to sadness, yet no line
Or denting furrow there but softly lent
A chaste refinement to his countenance,
Which, like some glorious picture, subtle, strong,
And full of tenderness, looked out between
His ample brow majestically crowned
With shining locks, white as the driven snow,
And beard voluminous that grandly hid,
As with a silver robe, his bosom broad.
But though his form was old, age seemed on him
To have descended as another spring;

A large fifth season numbered not among
The swift vicissitudes of Earth's dull years.
For he seemed one in whom the living fire
Of Youth was blended with a solemn, calm,
Eternal ancientness that could not change,
From its perfected beauty.
From his lips,
As he with clasped hands and face upturned,
Stood as in supplication, came hot words
Of sad, wild passion, overpowering love,
And tender pathos and a great despair.
"Oh! Thou Eternal Power, whom I obey,
Who, out of chaos and deep darkness, formed
This habitable world, how long, how long,
Am I to bear thy mighty mysteries
In tears and sorrow to the things that be?
I am reviled of men, and they in me
Find mystic terror and with starting eyes
And faltering speech pale at my very name,
As though I were some evil spirit sent
To snap the fragile thread of their vain lives;
Instead of the kind summoner that leads
Them out of countless sorrows to a sphere
Passing in bliss their most ecstatic dreams.
Thou hast invested me with sway supreme
O'er all things mortal for a season brief;
And man, whom I have ever loved as one
Holding affinity with things eterne,
And unto whom I never whisper 'come,'
Until Thou dost command me—he it is,

Who with a higher reason and a grasp
Keen, intellectual beyond the brute,
Has made me something lower than his life,
His silly life that runs from day to day,
And year to year away in shallow tide !
All things I love, Creator, good and kind ;
For in them all I find thy mighty soul.
The tiniest flower unobserved of men,
That blooms and sighs its little life away ;
The stately trees that live through centuries
To battle with the winds, and have a song
In every falling leaf and swaying bough ;
All birds, and beasts, and every living thing,
And the lone mountains and the rolling seas,
The clouds, the showers and the silent stars!
These, these I love, and yet the flower dies,
And so the tree, and so the brute, and so
The very mountains melt and ocean shrinks,
Through many centuries, into a vast
And trackless desert where no rain-drop falls.
And man, whom I love greater far than all,
For he, I know, is something nearer Thee
Than flower, or branch or other living thing—
Him at the last, I have to lead beyond
This little sphere specking the universe,
To that far kingdom in which he will rest,
But whence I must unceasingly return
To utter restlessness, and, at the last,
To dark annihilation—nothingness—
As though I had not been or could not be !"

He bowed his head, and drops like mortal tears
Fell from his lustrous eyes, then gathering
His ample folds around him, down he lay
And fell into a sleep beneath the stars.
And in his sleep there came to him in dream,
In that fair valley, even where he lay,
A shape most bright in airy phantasy,
Who poured into his ear a tale of woe,
In piteous accent supplicating him
To grant some boon, that he was fain to give,
From his great heart in all humility,
But that a mightier power stayed his hand,
And numbed his voice, and turned him into stone.
Yet, as within his dream, he grew so chill
With a vague, nameless terror in his brain,
That seemed to presage some eternal woe,
He straight awoke, and while the night wind breathed
Soft through the latticed branches overhead,
And while the quiet of the atmosphere,
In drowsy harmony with the blinking stars,
Was half within and half without his sleep,
And while the curvèd moon was sinking down
In melancholy glory to the West,
He saw his dream was even by him still,
But turned to palpable embodiment
And living tones and earnest speech that fell
Articulately sweet upon his ear.
"Ah, Love," cried he, addressing her who stood,
The fairest thing in all that valley fair,
"Methought, but even now, ere yet I waked,

Thou camest in my sleep and filledst up
The field of fancy in my misty brain;
Thy hair had even the same tint of gold
And swept as brightly on the dewy mead,
Thine eyes as blue, thy brow as snowy clear,
Thy form as fair, thy speech as musical,
And all thy limbs shone in the moonlight so,
Just as thou now art standing.
Wherefore, Love,
In tearful sadness comest thou to me?"
Thus Death, and to him, Love with trembling tone
Oped all her utterance with many sighs,
And stormy bosom that uprose and fell,
As though it held some living thing which fain
Would break voluptuous bondage and be free.
"Oh, wherefore, am I come to thee in tears?—
And, wherefore, to this solitude alone?—
And, wherefore, am I come at all, cold Death
And, wherefore, askest thou, when never yet
But for one only boon have I knelt down
In suppliance at thy feet as now I do?
But list, and I will tell thee all my tale,
I know thou art not cruel and revile
Myself for mine own bitterness, which is
But after all, poor Death, affection strong
Sharped into pain and a deep yearning lost
In deeper agony.
I am come far
O'er the arched distance of this teeming world
From a small storm-girt Occidental isle,

To crave of thee in this green Asian vale
The boon of happy hours and lengthening years
For a most gentle maiden and a youth,
Who, from the seeds of poor mortality,
Are, in the moving shadow of old Time,
Grown into so true flowers of their kind,
As to make sweet the life that hems them in
With virtues more ambrosial than the dawn
Holds in her dews and influences mild!
Their destinies long held them far apart,
But years and circumstance, and happy chance
Have brought them ever nearer, each to each
Until not many moons ago they stood,
Within the rosy pale, where mounting thought,
Touching their natures like Medean spell,
Transformed their yearnings into tender speech
So brimful of all earthly hopes, so fond,
So passionate—so earnest and so true,
That I, who overheard their whispered vows,
And saw into the secrets of their souls,
And marked her blushes and his ardent gaze
Half wished that I were earthly to enjoy
So keen an ecstacy!
                                        Most gentle Death,
The race of mortals, with whom pale decay
And blooming youth go ever hand in hand,
Numbers among its children some that are
Nearer the stars, yea, even from their birth
Than we well not of, and methinks, this twain
Is of that favored kind which born of earth

Hath close communion with the host of Heaven."
Then Death stood up, and as his form between
The paling stars and Love's deep glances came,
He spake, with finger stretched out to the East
Admonitory pointing where the morn
Flashed brightness from afar,
"A little while,
A very little while, and I am gone
For the long space of twelve revolving moons,
So Love, say on, if thou hast left unsaid
Aught that thou wouldst about this human twain,
Whom I have never seen, for sure, methinks,
If all thou hast to tell me is that these
Are lovely, why the flower is lovely too;
If all thou hast to urge is that their hearts
Beat in communion sweet, 'twas aye designed
That this should be so, and though Sin has made
A mighty ruin of the structure fair
Of Earth's felicity, the boundless scheme
Of the Great Author of eternal good,
Like a clear sky upon a summer eve
In which one faint cloud as an atom floats,
Doth, in its vastness, so much stretch beyond
The transitory state of mortal woe,
As to make sorrow less than one small cloud
As good is broader than the firmament."
"Thou reasoner cold," cried Love, with flashing eyes,
As from beneath her brows she gazed on Death,
Who stood as silent as the mountains lone
His head averted, listening—not unmoved,

But full of thoughts beyond the present while,
And solemn musings in his heart and brain
That led him to the weary, weary time
When he should pass beyond the things that be
Not for a season only, but for all
The unimagined future.

For a space
Love turned in anger petulant away,
And then again, relenting, looked around
And saw the valley green and purple hills
Drest in the shade and sunlight of the morn
And saw the trees, and birds, and the blue sky,
And felt the fresh air on her burning cheek,
But Death she saw not—silently she gazed,
Through the clear air—in solitude alone!

1886.

STANZAS ON A SMILE.

A smile containeth more than eye conceiveth,
For we judge darkly with our shallow reasons,
Thus what is false man true at times believeth,
Nor recks of hidden sarcasms and treasons,
Which wreathe the figure of their black intention,
In guise so pleasing to our sense of pleasure,
That we too trusting waive Deceit's invention,
And falsehood court for Truth's sublimer measure.

Smiles fall at times athwart the lives of mortals,
As sunbeams fall where scarcely sun e'er shineth,
And if the heart fling wide its throbbing portals
To feel the warmth deception's self divineth;
Having been chilled most churlish and unkindly,
Being forsworn what true Love ne'er forsweareth,
Judge not the act a fault conceived most blindly,
For sure of Love no human heart despaireth.

And as a smile the inward nature moveth,
Being the pledge of what man most desireth,
Namely, that Love which all things else improveth,
And in the end all other things out-tireth,

'Twere all devoid of what just sense dictateth
To find for weakness no extenuation,
By vowing that no innocence abateth
The first false step and parley with temptation.

A smile hath oft more power than a legion
Of tinkling, dainty, sweetly-spoken speeches,
A touch oft thaws the iciest bound region
In virtue's realm, e'en Virtue's self outreaches ;
Speech in its nakedness jarreth on the senses,
But mute suggestion, free from tongue-bound traces,
Conceals a thousand subtle, arch pretences,
To make a maiden sigh for Love's embraces.

The eye hath far more eloquence of passion
Contained within its bright, voluptuous glances,
Than tongue had ever wit enough to fashion
For lovers' opportunities and chances ;
Looks are so exquisite a distillation
Of what within the human bosom lurketh,
That speech superfluous lags by revelation
Of what chaste love the revelation shirketh.

The bold suggestion or insinuation
None the less dread though couched in language fairer,
Contains not half the fell contamination
To be of chastity the foul impairer,
As the coy smile Desire's self imbueth,
As the soft touch Desire's lewdness proffers,
Such snares oft Virtue in the end subdueth
Where dulcet speech would startle by its offers.

But why should I constrain my muse so sadly
To sing of things most hateful for reflection,
Why should I strive to paint a smile so badly,
Or give a touch so much of base infection;
Drawn from a thousand muddy springs within us,
Prompting to sin and joining in our sinning,
Sure Nature sends not every grace to win us
To deeper guilt, and damn us by the winning?

Perchance I've been betrayed by some fair smiler,
Some smooth-mouthed hypocrite of either gender,
And somewhat soured, turned a broad reviler
Of all arts fond, or all embraces tender;
Perchance if so the memory remaineth
Within my recollection somewhat bitter,
And in my nature its own vein ingraineth
Of Love deceived by sweet deception's glitter.

Perchance, but soft, I will not say for certain,
For why should I make positive my follies,
Or why confiding wrest away the curtain
That kindly hides so many melancholies?
I may have loved and been by Love outwitted,
For Wisdom lives not always in affection,
Thus Love, alas! is sometimes to be pitied
For having forged so cruel a connection,

Which only binds to pitilessly sever,
Which only woos to satirize our wooing,
Which but endears to make us hate for ever
Our ill-timed folly past beyond undoing;

I may know this, but why should I reveal it,
As something felt with more than common feeling?
My heart, methinks, would prompt me to conceal it,
Nor prove mine own the nature I'm revealing.

But even if some deep disposed enchainer
Have vanquished me with heavenly expression,
Shall smiles be bad because my entertainer
Hath pressed them captive to a false profession?
Consigning thus to unreserved damnation,
Things held most fair would be illegal judging,
And show a paltry spirit of vexation
That owns a blot and makes it worse by smudging.

Whose heart so cold and callous with satiety
Of Nature's beauty lavishly unfolded,
That will not recognize the grand variety
Her own pure soul of loveliness hath moulded;
With touch so delicate in all she graspeth,
With form so fair wherever she out-springeth,
That whatso'er her genial influence claspeth,
A grace begets, and thousand joys out bringeth?

If such an one there be, the grave must own him,
Locked in the cold constrainment of her bosom,
For surely living ne'er could Earth have known him,
And harboured wretch so tardy to unblossom
His sense of gratitude in free confession
Of things made fair by loveliness delightful,
By mutely stifling every glad expression
In senseless coldness wicked as despiteful!

Nature sows smiles, and her own voice decreeth
Where their bright joys luxuriant shall be scattered;
Nature the springs of warm affection freeth
In hearts by Fortune long perversely battered;
And as these things of her imagination,
For surely hers th' untutored hands that rear them,
Are always beings of a fair creation,
We should applaud and studiously revere them

For 'tis unnatural to forswear what Nature
Ordains as honest evidence of feeling;
Love owns but one untarnished nomenclature,
Truth knows no mean twixt fair and fickle dealing,
And whosoe'er this true intent reverseth,
By robbing Conscience of her voice of honour,
Nature belieth, and his own heart curseth
By forcing falsehood's garniture upon her.

1880.

TO THE SETTING SUN.

Thou art sinking wrapt in gold and purple glory,
  And the fervour of thy swift-declining fire,
Like the radiance of a martyr-soul in story
  Flashing upwards with a passionate desire ;
Like the brightness of an angel visitation,
  Or the beauty that encompasseth a child,
Is sweeping o'er my rapt imagination,
  Melodiously wild !

The bosom of the palpitating ocean
  Is the highway to the splendours of thy throne,
The waves feel a tremulous emotion
  In thy glory, that is portion of their own ;
While, clothed in thy dying incandesence,
  Flies that bright-winged loiterer, the day,
To melt in the lightning of thy presence
  Her keen, pure soul away !

Thou harmony that journeyest through heaven
  And scatterest thy riches on the earth,
Can the morn—or the noonday—or the even
  Know the mystery that ushered in thy birth ?

Though our wisdom is the wisdom that is olden
 Beyond the misty chronicles of Time,
It has never probed the secret of thy golden
 Awakening sublime!

Thou gazest on the clouds and on the showers,
 Thou beamest on the valleys and the hills,
Thou laughest with the birds and with the flowers,
 Thou leapest with the torrents and the rills;
Thou givest to the rainbow all her lightness
 And aerial magnificence above,
And the fresh young Springtide all her brightness
 And thousand thoughts of love!

But I wonder if the birds and if the flowers
 Ever worship thee as something kind and strong,
And I wonder if the clouds and if the showers
 Ever praise thee as a mystery in song;
Can they ever know, and knowing it, discover
 To the coldest ray that falleth from above,
That thou art their universal lover
 With a never-changing love?

The happy find in thee a theme for gladness,
 And the weary that are stricken cold and sad,
Find a balm in thy beauty for their sadness,
 Till they almost, in thy radiance, are glad;
Thou singest with the singing of the youthful,
 Thou blendest with the musings of the old,

And the love of the innocent and truthful
  Turns all thy rays to gold!

We see thee in thy rising and thy setting,
  Through all the idle dreaming of our years,
But our hearts are fashioned for forgetting,
  And we dim thee with the falling of our tears;
Thou teachest us the lesson pure and tender
  Of the love that imagineth no ill,
We are careless of thy warmth amid thy splendour,
  And so our hearts grow chill.

We are mortals, but our spirits ethereal,
  Are sparks from the heaven that is thine;
We have fashioned us a wonderful ideal,
  Immortality——Eternity divine!
Yet dreamily we move among the shadows
  Of a faith too subtle to be free,
While the poorest daisy in the meadows,
  Drinks in its faith from thee!

What avail if the light we are receiving
  Be clouded in the darkness of our dreams?
If we see, half doubting—half believing,
  The Divinity apparelled in thy beams?
Swift, shadowy comes Night upon our glances,
  And silently falls Death upon our brow,
And we sink in the ocean of our fancies,
  As thou art sinking now!

But as night is interwoven with the morrow,
  As our hopes are the sisters of our fears,
As our joy is the fountain of our sorrow,
  As our laughter is the solace of our tears;
So God, in the strength of His affection,
  Hath shrined in the bosom of Decay,
The seed of a mighty resurrection
  That shall not pass away!

1885.

INSPIRATION.

The lowly bard, unblest with classic fire,
To swell the strain that gushes from his lyre;
Must meekly strive from passing themes to raise
The world's reward and grudging meed of praise.
For him, alas! shines Homer's glorious fame,
A far-off star condensed into a name,
How can his rough, unpolished ear compute
The pleasing strains of Virgil's dulcet lute;
Or Ovid's store of wonder-fashioned writ,
Or Sappho's flame, or Martial's tingling wit?
For him Castalia's bard-inspiring tide,
Is like the stream that Tantalus defied,
A wished-for draught that must for ever roll,
At once to tempt and plague his thirsty soul.
But though debarred and bound for aye to grieve
O'er what he would, yet never can receive,
There is a volume reared before his eyes,
Whose wondrous pages stretch unto the skies;
Sublimely varied, graced from end to end,
With more of worth than ever yet was penned
By all the bards of Earth's all various climes,
Through length'ning past or in the present times.

All hail, Creation ! when I raptured view
The Spring's green robe and glorious eye of blue ;
Or scan the wealth of Flora's flowering train,
And hear the skylark's heavenward-mounting strain ;
Or when I mark the rainbow gorgeous tower,
Eternal Truth apparelled in a shower,
Then Poesy's enlivening touch I feel,
Though faltering speech her worth can ne'er reveal,
But, falling from a bard's unlettered tongue,
Obscures a part and leaves the rest unsung.
All hail, Creation! when to Summer's prime,
The laughing Earth steps gladsome to the chime
Harmonious rung from every rural glade,
Through rustling leaves, and cool, sequestered shade.
Through whispering gales whose balmy, scented breeze
Fans golden waves on cereal swelling seas,
When scents the brier, when blooms the dainty rose,
The fairest gem that Flora's hand bestows,
When hangs the dew bright-glistening on the thorn,
Night's sole bequest to grace the youthful morn.
All hail, Creation! when with royal tread,
Comes Autumn with his harvest-girdled head,
With mien august, with jovial, hearty pride,
And Peace and Plenty smiling 'neath his stride ;
A very king whose teeming empire pours
From pole to pole Earth's blest and fruitful stores,
To glad alike, with rich, unsparing hand,
The owner and the tiller of the land.
All hail, Creation! when with roaring blast,
Decrepit Winter ends the year at last,

Clothed in his snows and scattering far and wide
An icy gale that crusts the limpid tide;
Yet though he frown with dark and lowering state,
All social revels joyful on him wait.
Meek Charity, attendant, turns to scan
The woes, the wants, and miseries of man;
Cheered by her warmth pinched Penury uprears
A smiling face, through grim Misfortune's tears,
While over all, with mirthful, twinkling eye,
Christmas presides the season's deity,
And holly-crownèd, pours his strain along
In one eternal, heavenly, joyful song!
All glorious themes, what more can bard require,
His muse to guide, embellish, and inspire?
Yet if he would leave Nature's fair demesne,
Where God paints beauty on the simplest scene,
And where his strain he must for ever pour
The work to praise, the Maker to adore;
Then, let him contemplate his own frail kind,
Among whose ranks in thousands will he find
Such blinded votaries of such hellish plans,
That sure would tempt no other heart but man's.
Here if he will, on this black-written page,
He may indulge the heat of Satire's rage,
Or strive to touch with Irony's quick smart
The vices and the follies of the heart.
Here may he see Wealth born devoid of brains,
Yet fawned and flattered by admiring trains,
While starved-out talent, 'mong the giddy crowd,
Is almost grudged a coffin and a shroud.

Here may he watch a thousand snares unfold
Their arts seductive, studied, ruthless, cold,
To lure with Love's divine and sacred name
Virtue to Vice, and continence to shame.
Here may he note Religion's devotees,
Puffed up with pride, transformed to Pharisees,
Each so intent upon the way to rise
In orthodox contortion to the skies;
That while they hug each canonized grimace,
Truth flies affrighted from the near embrace,
And leaves the wrangling, litigating clar
To enter Heaven the best way that they can.
Oh! golden age, when Education's ray,
Proclaims the zenith of Advancement's day,
If from the gilded follies of the time,
The mock pathetic, and the mock sublime,
A simple bard, with wild, untutored art,
May wring the best and most instructive part,
If that may be—ye powers with grace divine,
Pour down the gift, to him the task assign,
No higher boon, no dearer can he crave,
Till mute his homely lyre rests beside him in the grave.

1880.

GLADYS.

Sunny-haired young treasure
Of a happy twain,
Fruit of Love's pure pleasure,
And delightful pain;
Thou art in Life's morning,
I, alas! shall soon
Pass into the weariness
Of its afternoon!

But thy bright-eyed gladness
Wonderfully kind,
Banishes the sadness
From my moody mind;
And thy merry laughter,
Clear, and fresh, and free,
Is a simple melody
Of happiness to me.

And thy baby graces
Have a mystic spell,
More than thought embraces,
More than speech can tell;

More than I can fathom
  In my older brain,
Like the scent of flowers,
  Or the plash of rain;

Like the Spring's awaking
  Drest in bud and bloom,
Like the Morning breaking
  From Night's chilly gloom;
Like the soft effulgence
  Of some silver star,
Scattering its brightness
  In the skies afar!

Like all subtle feeling
  That is set beyond
Art of words revealing,
  But which fancy fond
Lingers o'er enraptured,
  Though it cannot guess
Half the solemn meaning
  Of its loveliness.

Thou hast never tasted
  Pleasures that will cloy,
Fresh and all unwasted
  Every fount of joy;
Scarcely o'er the border
  Of this life, I ween,
Earth is very fairy-land,
  Thou its happy queen.

Winsome little maiden,
  Earth, and sky and sea,
All are wonders laden
  With mysteries for thee;
Thy very thoughts are flowers
  That tenderly enclose
The beauty of the daisy,
  The fragrance of the rose.

Then go on in sweetness,
  Ever pure and good,
To the full completeness
  Of perfect womanhood;
Always true and tender
  Through the changing years,
Through the cloud and sunshine
  Of laughter and of tears.

Till the chain be riven,
  Till the soul be free,
Till the gift be given,
  Of Immortality;
Till in God's own kingdom
  Pure and undefiled,
Thou shalt be for ever
  Again a little child!

1885.

STANZAS.

THERE was a time when, cradled in the lap
Of genial Fortune, I unwitting slept,
Nor dreamed of aught that savoured of mishap,
Nor things to be regretted and bewept;
For kindly Fates their guardian influence kept,
And from all storms did tenderly enwrap
My springing life with pure, unsullied joy,
With arts so fond and faithfully adept
In Love's own essence, pure without alloy,
That childhood in an earthly Eden stepped;
And, ravished in the harmony which swept
Its tiny world, felt not a pleasure cloy,
Nor knew, nor recked of aught but what seemed sweet
employ.

Unknown, untrod, before me stretched the plain
To be explored and travelled through life's years;
Ah! then I counted not the journey's pain,
Nor timorous, racked my childhood's heart with fears,
Nor thought of sunshine melting into tears
O'er the grand issue, or the doubtful gain;
For Innocence, the guardian of the young,
Whose seraph form in childhood best appears,

Then closer to my budding nature clung,
And made me blind to much which now endears
My soul to kneel where Guile her sceptre rears,
And with a syren's soft, beguiling tongue
Ne'er wins the ear to list but what the heart is wrung.

So now I stand upon the utter brim,
And Life's perspective streches far below,
Beyond, outswelling to the hazy rim,
Beyond which line no earthly ken may go,
Nor dare to grasp what Death alone will show;
Far, far behind, already growing dim,
Nestles dear Childhood's calm sequestered vale,
Bathed in fair Memory's soft, refining glow,
And wafting still its flower-scented gale,
And rising to my ear the grateful flow
Of babbling rills, the voices that I know;
The silver echoes of Love's first fond tale,
That seems to hold again my heart within its pale.

But I have not climbed up the first ascent,
To take on youth's tall pinnacle my stand,
Free from the road's unfailing chastisement,
Of Care's engrossing, self-inflicted brand,
The stern sign manual of temptation's hand:
Proving much time and energy misspent
In heedless dalliance with illicit charms
And graces, which made all my parts intent
On beauty's smile, nor recked her lurking harms

And after issues sadly consequent
On the blind, reckless, and absorbing bent,
Which madly stifling all my heart's alarms,
Made life's beclouded morn a sky of treacherous calms.

Yet still through all, e'en in my darkest hour
And direst stumbling, one fond wish hath thrilled
My erring heart, with such sustaining power
Of firm resolve to see at last fulfilled
Its dearest thought by nature's touch instilled;
And free bequeathed as her instinctive dower,
That I might stand amidst the chosen throng,
Whose words nor Time nor Death have ever killed,
And pour with them my trembling strain along,
If Heaven the grace of truthful purpose willed,
My artless and untutored muse to gild
With love of love and hatred of all wrong
The spring of every thought and keynote of my song!
1880.

TO AMBITION.

All hail, Ambition! Sovereign of the heart's
Most fell desires, and pure diviner parts;
Let my frail muse take up her homely lyre
With reverent mien and homage-born desire,
To sound a strain which, ere it dies away,
Shall own thy pow'r and universal sway.
For oh! most potent shaper of each plan,
Whose lines affect the destiny of man,
What heart is free from thy strong guiding hand,
Thy ruling voice and echoing high command?
What Life can swear when all its days are done
That through its years Ambition it had none?
The king, the prince, the peasant and the peer,
Each moving puppet on the Earth's broad sphere,
Each in his turn at each and ev'ry age
Feels the behest of thine instinctive rage.
No soul too mean, no spirit strung too high,
But what scans Earth, or strives to pierce the sky.
No sin so great, no virtue e'er so true
But what through thee the inspiration drew.
Thy climbing stem springs pregnant from the womb,
Nor dies, but when its branches touch the tomb.

Scarce is the babe given heritage of birth
To human kind and Nature's mother Earth,
Ere thou, unknown and unsuspected, wreak
Thy yet crude will in many an infant freak.
Then through the schoolboy's tedious poring hours
Thy voice directs and stimulates his powers ;
And as the growths of frame and mind progress,
Thy edict falls with ever-strength'ning stress.
See when the passions first begin to prove
The sturdy strength of Youth's o'ermastering love,
Thy touch inspires the wish for Beauty's smile,
And linked with Love hath kindred power meanwhile.
Thou art the light 'neath whose enlivening rays,
Spring patriot love and bards' undying lays,
The Statesman's pride of Wisdom's governing laws
The Soldier's zeal to live a life of wars,
The Inventor's schemes, the Scholar's recluse flame,
The Artist's pure and high exalted aim—
All, all are grafted in thy fruitful soil ;
Thine is the grace whose strong o'ermastering toil,
In fetters pregnant with a thousand fears
Forged on the anvil of the fleeting years,
Encircles all through each and every care
Of hopes deferred or lowering black despair.
But if thine influence, genial as the sun,
Can in such healthful glorious channels run,
And wake to Wisdom's sweet sublime behest
An answering note in man's imperfect breast,
Then doubly cursed, and doubly dammed is he
Who takes thy prompting heavenly note to be

The fond adviser of his own black schemes,
And guardian angel of his morbid dreams.
If such an one there be, 'twere well indeed,
That Heaven had blasted each aspiring seed,
And in its mercy made his body whole,
But crushed Ambition from his paltry soul!

1880.

ADDRESS TO THE ANGRY DISPUTANTS IN THE CHURCH.

Ye cassocked, stoled, and holy men,
Who hold Religion's traces,
A humble poet fain would pen
A word to all your graces.
From Canterbury down to York
There's nought but discord raging,
And sure Old Bogey's at his work,
A fearful slaughter waging.

The cure of souls on you bestowed
Through rites of ordination,
Ye make to carry such a load
Of righteous inspiration;
That all who teach without your pale,
Ye prove by mathematics,
Must be (and sure ye cannot fail)
A race of damned schismatics.

But oh! examine well the bent
Of over-rigid bias,
Your fiercest wrath ne'er drowns the scent,
When once the truth comes nigh us.

And know that honest sterling worth,
  And pure exalted nature,
Claims kinship with a higher birth
  Than empty nomenclature.

Think ye that Nature's kindling flame
  Hath ne'er unaided given
A spark of grace, whose fervor came
  Direct from highest heaven;
A deeper sense of love divine,
  And nobler gift of teaching,
Without a rite to bid it shine,
  Or guide it in its preaching?

Your courts of law, your deep research,
  Your bombast of tradition,
Have ne'er flung Folly from her perch,
  Nor crushed the fiend Sedition;
But like a member out of joint
  With Nature's first intention,
Each twisted theory is the point
  From which starts fresh dissension.

Think ye Religion's end is gained,
  Her high estate promoted,
By proving how her psalms were strained,
  Or how her priests were coated?
Think ye depends the flow of Grace,
  To us poor souls who falter,
Upon a fellow-sinner's place
  And posture at the altar?

Away with such unchristian strife!
  Such rankling party feeling,
The aim, the beauty, and the life,
  The truth of all concealing.
Hate is the noxious weed that springs
  From out your ill-timed wrangles,
Till what the singing parson sings,
  The speaking parson strangles.

So learn to cultivate below,
  The virtue, Toleration,
Don't let the flame of party glow
  By Truth's assassination;
Remember, while Religion's face
  Ye are so deftly carving,
That thousands for her saving grace
  Are languishing and starving.

But come it shall, in spite of strife,
  And difference of opinion,
The brighter reign, the nobler life,
  Of perfect Love's dominion,
When man and man in every clime,
  By hate no more excited,
Shall glad the eyes of hoary Time
  By being all united.

1880.

TO A LITTLE CHILD.

The morn, the fresh, the clear, the happy morn
Of life and love is shining through thine eyes,
Like some embodied brightness earthward borne
From Paradise;
Waking within my heart, that beats forlorn,
A thousand sympathies
Fair as thyself and lovely as the dawn,
When blithe on soaring wing the lark up flies
A melody of Earth evanished to the skies!

What various fancies slumber in thy brain?
What unformed hopes? what passions mute and still?
Hast thou yet known the barbèd shaft of pain,
Or felt the thrill
That steals like some wild current through each vein
To weaken and to kill
The living threads of resolution's skein,
And dull the heart and sense and soul until
Sin smiles an angel fair above the prostrate will?

What happy visions on my memory teem
Of Childhood's early and enchanted years!
To-day—to-morrow—wherefore do ye seem
So fraught with fears?
Is Love become a scentless, withered theme?
Back, back ye starting tears;
Oh, for a draught from Lethe's fabled stream,
That sights, and sounds, and all which now endears,
Might melt before mine eyes and die within mine ears!

And yet 'twere hard to feel oblivion close
Around the delicately-tunèd strings
That vibrate to the raptures and the woes
Existence brings;
Some face, some voice will live amid the throes
Of present sorrowings,
Too dear to be forgotten in repose,
Too bound up in the web of human things,
To fly the sacred grot whence pure Affection springs.

Thou little one, the Earth is very fair;
The fields, the skies, the mountains and the plains,
The fragrant incense of Spring's perfumed air,
The summer rains,
The sunshine and the birds are free from care,
And Love for aye remains
Unchanged by all that man may do or dare,
Pure and unspotted mid Sin's deepest stains,
And free from all its woes, regrets, remorse and pains!

Thou little one, the wandering thought that stirred
The pulses of my heart, hath taken flight
Like some wild-warbling and impassioned bird
With Beauty dight;
But in mine ear its shrill, free note is heard,
And to my ravished sight,
'Tis mounting—fading, till the skies engird
Its transitory music and delight,
In heaven's eternal smile unfathomably bright!
1881.

TO AN OLD TEA-POT.

Thou tea-pot olden, cracked and brown,
  Be thou my Hippocrene,
As from the shelf thou gazest down,
  Beneficently sheeny;
Let bards deep-learned in classic lore,
  Go back to dusty myths of yore,
  Old Greek or Roman fable;
But I to thee a meed of praise,
  Unmindful of the Muse's bays,
  In these prosaic times will raise
  As well as I am able!

Dear Cowper, spirit meek and brave,
  Through all his dark affliction;
Sang of the joys thy juices gave,
  In honest Saxon diction;
"The cups that cheer"—kind, simple heart!
  That could so lovingly impart,
  In spite of years of nurses;
To England's Muse so sweet a ring,
  Oh! let me here my tribute bring,
  And reverently hail thee king
  Of homely, fireside verses!

Well, let the pleasing thought go by,
'Twas one of Fancy's capers,
She brought the poet to my eye,
Through all thy steamy vapours;
But thou, whom once the potter formed,
And whom a thousand brews have warmed
With more than earthly ardours;
Oh! list to one that oft has poured
Thy amber liquid, while the board
Was fat with dainties from the hoard
Of toothsome English larders!

Ah! Memory nymph whose silver veil
O'er Time's large form is clinging,
Poor life is but a simple tale
Of sorrow and of singing!
But laughter lingers round the spout
That from the shelf now stares me out,
Although its tip is broken;
And friends again I seem to see
In fumes of Souchong and Bohea;
And hear again the voices free
That through the years have spoken!

And I'm a fogey old and grey
With lack of this world's riches;
I've put the tenderest joy away
That all mankind bewitches.
And why?—Thou vessel cracked and old,
Hast thou forgot my age of gold?

In thy hard case ne'er lingers,
As something thou canst understand,
The memory of that gentle hand,
That once, when we our future planned,
Clasped thee with its dear fingers!

1886.

LETTER TO MY SISTER.

I have a wish, it is a poet's wish,
To write a letter unto thee in rhyme,
A sort of carefully concocted dish
Of words and syllables, not too sublime,
But grateful with a wild, sweet-smelling savour,
Though whether it be virtue, or a crime
To thus demand thy patience and thy favour,
I know not, and indeed, some other time
Must this resolve—so for the nonce, sweet sis,
Stay censure with a ripe, delightful kiss!

2

Ye shades and spirits of those mighty men,
Who gave the potency of Queen Mab's wand
To that frail instrument yclept the pen,
Assist me now, and change, with fancy fond,
Cold thoughts into swift messengers warm-breathing,
Whose quick vitality shall pass beyond
This moment of their birth, like incense wreathing
From some great altar, over peakèd mond,
Till borne on wafting winds it scented lies,
With all its sweetness bosomed in the skies.

3

My little world is quiet, no alarms
Break the calm lullaby of its content;
Voluptuous Peace half smiles at Mars' grim arms
As though they were but playthings, haply meant
For men to cheat old Time into a fleetness,
As in the old days, plumèd gallants spent
Their sinewy strength in chivalry's brave sweetness,
And languished only in Love's languishment,
For some fair lady's smile that should repay
All chances and all perils of the fray.

4

We have been acting farces, singing songs,
Our talent is a simple gift I ween.
No Desdemona here—no tragic wrongs,
No Hamlet played by Irving to be seen;
But we play farces, and to see the faces
Stretch into laughter, chasing care and spleen,
Thou wouldst aver our amateurs' grimaces
Are worth a Langtry's beauty, grace and mien;
For in this land, where hepatitis rules,
A laugh hath deeper wisdom than the schools.

5

And then I read all books; as doth a bee
All flowers visit, adding to its store,
So strive I to obtain truth pure and free
From the rich sweets of England's classic lore.

My garden is but small, yet ever clinging
To branch, to blossom, and to grassy floor,
Is wisdom's crystal dew, and always singing
The voices that will sing for evermore;
Nor doth mine ear grow callous, nor mine eye
Grow sick of beauty with satiety.

6

For I have Shakspere, Byron, Shelley, Keats,
And Spenser's gentle, faery-written page,
With knights and dames brimful of Love's conceits,
And holy virtues, and chivalric rage:
And Tennyson, the laureate, whose laurels
Have not been won upon the British stage,
And Paley with his arguments and morals,
And Gibbon's history from th' Augustan age;
Besides a French work on the popes of Rome
A saintly, dry and dreary kind of tome.

7

Now is not this a quiet life? I'll vow
Young Corydon, that fair idyllic swain,
Ne'er piped his pipings 'neath o'er-hanging bough,
While his white flocks roamed idly on the plain,
As lazily as I, but, where the ill is,
In my case, is, that I must pipe in vain:
I cannot woo a bashful bright-eyed Phyllis
To be my bride—but when I write again,
Who knows?—Yet stay, I'll leave thy wit to guess
The thought my rhyme conceals but to express.

My heart is light, so light that I can jest
At Love, and see no magic in his smiles;
I could watch Beauty with a cynic's zest.
And coldly analyse her dainty wiles;
And tell thee how Youth's glowing fires will deaden,
When Age, the scorner, every charm reviles,
When cheeks grow pale, and eyes wax dim and leaden,
And withering Care, heart-breaking reconciles
The once brave spirit to forswear its mirth
For a few feet of consecrated earth!

9

Death is the end of all things: pause and think;
(Alas my verse hath ta'en a solemn tone!)
Life's road for ever winds along the brink
Of that vast chasm we must brave alone:
Eternity looks out on human fancies—
The wreathèd smile stops, frozen into stone,
There comes a terror in our laughing glances;
The blood-warm flesh grows cold against the bone,
'Tis Death—he takes us gravely by the hand,
And leads us to the solemn, silent land!

10

Yea, silent 'tis for us—thou mightiest sage
What knowest thou of Death?—thou stolèd priest,
Thou hoary prophet wisdom-fed with age,
Ye have sat long at life's gay motley feast.
Have ye heard echoes 'yond the solemn portal

'Neath which have passed the greatest and the least?
Know ye if man have part with the immortal?
Or if he rot and perish like the beast?
Your answer? Blend the serpent with the dove,
Preach Hell, and Heaven, and Faith, and Hope and Love!

11

Wisdom knows not of these, she cannot probe
Their import strange, they are beyond her ken;
She dares to touch their mystic, awful robe,
And slinks abashed amid the ways of men.
We know them by their names, but speculation
Dulls i'the brain, and reason shrinks, and then
Bewildering legions of imagination
Clash like the angels in the conflict when
The good and evil fought, and one was hurled,
From highest heaven to curse the sinless world!

12

Away thou melancholy Muse away!
Life's wondrous journey is but just begun,
'Tis morn, the songster warbles on the spray,
A thousand flowers open to the sun;
The sky bends down all azure-robed and lighted
With a clear smile of love—the streamlets run;
Oh! must the happy, happy life be blighted,
The beauty lost, when all the toil is done?
Not so—a voice, the soul's own voice replies,
Life wanes and sets, but never, never dies!

1882.

FORGIVEN.

A Tale of the Peninsula War

(From Sir H. Cope's History of The Rifle Brigade.)

Here 's a soldier's simple story,
  Listen every one,
'Tis no deed of martial glory
  Well and nobly done;
But a tale of honest feeling,
  Human—kindly—brave,
And the men who acted in it
  Slumber in the grave.

2

'Twas when England's cannons' rattle,
  Shook the land of Spain,
When in many a bloody battle,
  Half our sons were slain;
Crauford, in those southern regions,
  Led us bravely, he,
Through the fire of much campaigning,
  On to victory.

3

English hearts that did inherit,
From their sturdy sires,
Agincourt's eternal spirit,
Cressy's deathless fires!
English hearts that never faltered
With their dying breath,
English pluck that never wavered
In the face of death!

4

But there came a foe more stealthy
Than the hosts of Ney,
Wasting bodies hale and healthy,
By degrees away;
Deadlier than the Spanish bullets
Or Corunna's snows,
Hunger stalked among the army,
With its hundred woes!

5

And two soldiers, heedless spurning
Duty's iron law,
Only felt their hunger burning,
But the bread they saw;
And a peasant's house they entered,
Foes—they had the right?
Here was food—and there was safety
In a hurried flight.

6

Crauford round his out-posts riding,
  Sudden saw them then,
Fleeing from their place of hiding,
  Knew them for his men.
Swift as thought, the chase was given
  Hunted—weary—caught,
They were dragged to camp as felons
  Who had bravely fought!

7

And their doom? A hundred lashes?
  Ay, and fifty more,
Till their backs in living gashes
  Should be wounded sore!
On the morrow came the order,
  Ready was the whip,
And the penalty was spoken,
  In the one word—"Strip."

8

Squarely massed the martial column,
  Not a single sound,
But a silence—painful—solemn,
  Fell on all around.
Then with voice of husky effort
  That the stillness broke,
One of those condemned to suffer
  Turned, and thus he spoke.

9

"General, is the past so faded?
Think of days gone by
When together we paraded
Captives, you and I.
Whitelocke was our leader then, Sir,
Rank had taken wing
We were only soldiers then, Sir
Pris'ners for our king"*

10

And with rough pathetic passion
No one bade him stay,
In a simple, soldier fashion
Went he on to say
How his last crust he had eaten
In an equal share,
Comrade-like and open-hearted
With his leader there.

11

"You, Sir, told me, you would never
That poor act forget;
You these bonds of shame can sever
And release me yet.
What need I to speak of hunger?
'Tis but vain to tell,
That which every man among us
Only knows too well!"

* This was on the occasion of the retaking of Buenos Ayres by the Spaniards in 1806; when the whole of the English Army were taken prisoners.

12

Think ye that in vain he pleaded
Mercy might be shown?
Think ye that his words unheeded
Fell on hearts of stone?
Every mother's son around him—
All who saw and heard
Felt their hearts a-beating for him
After every word!

13

Crauford spake not, touched—unshaken,
Discipline must stand,
Why had this rash fool forsaken
His express command?
But before his thoughts were able
Thus in speech to end,
Swift he saw the cat uplifted
And the lash descend.

14

"Who," said he, in voice of thunder,
To the bugler there,
"Told you, you could flog I wonder:
Instant—leave the square.
And let not a lash be lifted
Other than this one;
He is worthy of a pardon,
Let him be undone."

15

Squarely massed the martial column,
Warriors true and tried,
In a silence deep and solemn
Was the man untied.
Words—too full for words his heart then,
All that he could see,
Was his leader who had heard him
And declared him free!

16

Crauford spake few words of greeting,
Feeling made him dumb,
For his own good heart was beating
Like a muffled drum.
But his voice fell pained, though kindly,
'Neath the Spanish trees,
"Why do soldiers brave as you are
Do such crimes as these?"

17

Squarely massed the martial column,
Crauford stayed not then,
In a silence deep and solemn
Gazed he on his men.
And he mounted on his charger,
Doubly great and good
And he left his soldiers standing
Even as they stood!

1883.

VERSES

(*Spoken in a Barrack Room in India, Christmas Day*, 1880.)

Comrades in arms, and soldiers all
Of Britain's loved and honored land ;
The Muse responsive greets your call
And wakes, obedient to demand,
To here, in this gay, festive band,
A cheerful pledge of love bestow,
With brimming glass—uplifted hand,
To all we love—to all we know !

Comrades, the true, the leal, the brave,
All pledged in Freedom's cause to wield
The sword with which your fathers clave
The chivalry of Cressy's field ;
May never, never, Britons yield
To dark oppression's tyrant claim
One trophy blazoned on their shield
Of patriot and immortal fame !

Comrades, 'twere hardly meet to boast,
But by the shade of him who died
A victor o'er the vanquished host
Which sank beneath Trafalgar's tide ;

Fill to the hearts that have defied,
Beneath their banner high unfurled,
The pomp, the majesty, the pride
Of all the navies of the world !

Comrades, a toast,—the faces dear,
The forms of loved ones far away,
They cannot see their children here,
They cannot mark what we would say ;
But, oh, may life's declining ray
Glint cheerful on their old grey hairs,
And softly fling around Decay,
All charms that love can give, all warmth affection bears !

Comrades, once more !—the pledge that starts
The passion Nature's self designed,
The lasses who have won your hearts,
The lasses ye have left behind ;
Oh, may they never prove unkind !
But faithful 'mid temptation's harms,
Reserve for ye with ever constant mind,
Affection's every grace and Love's supremest charms !

1880.

THE UNDERTAKER.

The undertaker's wife is fair,
  And hale and blithe is he,
And blooming are the children
  That climb upon his knee;
Bright-eyed and full of childhood's mirth
  And innocence and glee!

Their father is a wealthy man,
  The beggar from his door,
Ne'er goes without some kindly alms
  Given from bounty's store;
For in days gone by the rich man was
  A lowly man and poor.

But with increase of years rolled in
  A golden, golden tide,
And greater swelled his affluence
  As those around him died;
Till he was one of the richest men
  Round all the country side.

His garden, it is prim and neat
  A haunt for lovely things,

Where roses bloom in summer time,
  And on his downy wings
Floats the gay-colored butterfly,
  And sweet the linnet sings.

And all this life is sprung from Death,
  The death of his own kind,
And many a gloomy hearse has he
  Oft slowly walked behind;
Perchance, while golden coins danced
  Brightly before his mind.

Why not? They were not kith nor kin,
  Those mortals still and cold,
That, mourned by many a scalding tear,
  Towards the grave yard rolled;
Death gave the mourners all their grief,
  But gave him all his gold.

And yet he hath a tender heart,
  Full loveable and fond,
With many a sweet familiar joy
  And dear domestic bond;
Yet withal one that calmly looks
  Of earthly ties beyond.

He knows how brief is earthly life,
  He sees it pass away,
Not as the workers in the world,
  But constant, day by day

He thinks of Death and moves with Death,
And Death with him doth stay.

Perhaps he knows, at least, he feels
How vain the pomp and show,
How hollow oft the lives that give
To Death the plumes of woe;
How false a thousand living things,
How true the dead below!

True in the debt that they have paid,
True to the law of dust,
If false through every earthly change,
In this last, great change just—
Beyond all earthly vanity,
Or love or hate or lust!

The last year's beauty of the spring,
Who graced the fête and ball,
Who raised a thousand, thousand hopes,
And stirred the hearts of all—
He made her dreary winding sheet
And sold her costly pall!

The white-haired magnate of the shire,
A soldier old and brave,
Whose name and deeds an eloquence
To peer and peasant gave—
He carved the epitaph that tells
His virtues o'er his grave!

The undertaker's wife is fair,
  And hale and blithe is he,
And blooming are the children
  That climb upon his knee;
Bright-eyed and full of childhood's mirth
  And innocence and glee!

But gentle death will come to him
  As meekly as a dove,
And unto all that love him well,
  And those that he doth love,
To lead them whither?—where is life?
  In Earth?—or Heaven above?

A gentle thing and wonderful
  Is quiet Death I ween,
And beautiful as opening life
  Is life's last closing scene
That leads us to the happiness
  Of peaceful churchyard green!

1886.

IN MY GARDEN.

Now I feel in airy mood,
Walking with the sisterhood
Of unfettered Fancy's laughing train
That comes trooping in my brain;
Subtle shapes and mystic voices
Over which my heart rejoices,
For thay float so free from care
In the oriental air,
And they come with looks so sweet,
That my languid pulses beat
To a spiritual tone
Softer than Apollo's own;
And the essences of things
Seem endowed with whisperings,
Which I know and understand,
Though they are of fairy-land.
In the rose a merry fay
Uttereth her silver lay,
And as soft she folds her pinions
In her odorous dominions,
Clad in dew and gossamer,
All the other flowers stir

In their pots and earthy beds,
Lifting to the moon their heads,
While upon the air of night
Palpitating with delight,
From the rose this tiny fay
Uttereth her silver lay.
'I am hid from mortal eyes
By impalpable disguise;
But I have a regal throne
And an empire of my own,
And my speech is ever heard
By the bee and by the bird,
And the butterfly that flits,
And the squirrel as he sits
Underneath the mango tree
Is a jester blithe for me;
Though he hath not cap nor bells,
Merry are the tales he tells;
For his mirth-inducing pranks
He receives our royal thanks,
And that he's a Solomon,
We are long agreed upon.
I am queen of bud and blade,
And my tiny court is made
Of all things beneath the sun,
That can flit, or dance, or run.
On me doth the lizard dote,
As he puffeth out his throat,
While a sunbeam from on high
Looks through his anatomy;

The cicala when he can,
A most loyal gentleman,
Cometh with a grass-blade green
On his hip for sword I ween,
His devotion to display,
Though he quickly hops away!
I have early intimations
From the starry constellations
Of the things that will appear
In this lower atmosphere.
From the Pleiads, Merope
Many wonders breathes to me
And she tells me in the skies,
Spite of human sophistries,
And all creeds profound or clever,
Love exists for aye and ever!"
Here my poem I will close
With this ditty of the rose;
For the merry voice is dead,
And the fay herself is fled
With the thoughts that gave her birth,
To some region not of Earth.
So, adieu, to fay and fancy
And poetic necromancy;
Why should I a vigil keep
When the world is gone to sleep?
Better far to be a sleeper
Than a drowsy vigil-keeper.
Though the spirit of the rose
Greater wonders should disclose

Breathing starry secrets rare
To this oriental air,
I'll away without repining,
Till the sun again be shining!

1885.

WRITTEN IN JANUARY 1885.

We mortals, moving in th' eternal ken
Of Him which is Eternal, call that Time,
Which answers to the atom thought of men,
And make our lives' brief periods sublime
In our own puny souls, while Life alas!
Is scarce the summer of an arctic clime;
Frail as a flower—withering as the grass
O'er which a wintry wind in solemn dirge doth pass!

What is a day—a century—an age?
Names that the tongue hath uttered and the brain
Out of its weakness fashioned to assuage
The hunger-thought that cries for Truth in vain!
There is no past, save in man's starveling sense,
His anxious future is a speck—a stain
That fades in the unspeakable—immense,
Eternal *now* of God's unbounded affluence!

It seems but yesterday, since I, a child,
Looked out on life as on a boundless sea;
Scarce hath my barque been tossed on billows wild,
Scarce have I known how solemn 'tis *to be*

Ere I descry a shore dim, vast, profound,
Closer than Childhood seemeth now to me,
And Life's rough surges fall without a sound
Upon that ghostly marge that loometh all around.

This then the end—the goal—the land of rest
To which I am so near? Why Life is now
Less than the thought that moves my anxious breast
Less than the foam that sparkles 'neath the prow
Of my frail barque, I feel that I have striven
In the vast shadow of the Eternal brow
And known it not, but onward blindly driven,
With heart and mind and soul too often passion-riven,

While coldly hardening every instinct bright,
While rushing past has been Time's solemn stream,
While growing fainter every pure delight,
While growing stronger each delusive dream!
Oh, miracle of weakness! Thou whom we
Through all Life's stumblings reverently deem
The one Omnipotent, environ me,
For well I know that Thou my only help canst be!

1885.

A CHRISTMAS REVERIE

Christmas, not yet the charm is fled
That made thy name in days of yore,
The sweetest through the seasons four;
When Childhood's heart and Childhood's head
Were filled with fairy lore!
When tongues which now are mute were spells,
And something from thy merry bells
Rang out that rings no more!

The snow was then a mantle white
Spread by a gentle fairy hand—
Again I near the fir-tree stand,
And watch its coloured tapers bright
Shine on the laughing band.
The tree was but a common tree,
But, somehow, then it seemed to be
A gift from fairy land!

With what commingled glee and fear,
Though Childhood never gave it name,

I dipt into snapdragon's flame,
And thought the plums were prizes dear,
Well worthy of the game!
And even still they may be so,
But this is all I care to know,
They do not seem the same!

Then mistletoe and holly gleamed
While soft the firelight on them played,
As if they were on purpose made
To deck the pictures whence outbeamed
Dear features—now decayed!
It seems so little time gone by,
That scarce have they had time to die,
Ere I, myself, must fade!

Yet still in spite of dreams dispelled,
And Hope grown cold and Love o'erthrown,
And Doubt in early Faith broad-sown;
So tender are thy memories held
Though many years are flown!
That, Christmas, ringing through thy chimes,
Floats a faint echo of old times
Though with a saddened tone,

Which seems to tell me I have killed
Some goodness of the heart and brain,

That never can come back again—
That might have grown and spread and filled
A life, too dull and vain!
Had not a greater Power than mine,
More wise—more loving—more divine,
Willed it should not remain!

1885.

INTRODUCTION TO A POEM.

A Fragment.

I

Time, that with step silent, resistless, slow,
Steals ever at the heels of mortal man,
Hoar chronicler of all his weal and woe,
And passive agent in th' eternal plan
That with unmeasured, universal span
Arches creation, and sublimely towers
O'er mightiest thrones and dynasties below,
Is one of many subtile-working powers
Incorporated with this crumbling life of ours.

2

Oh, Time! if I invoke thee, give me years,
And happy mood and kindly circumstance,
That I may rise above the modest fears,
Which make me chary of my utterance,
And temper me, oh Time, to turn to Chance
A heart true steeled 'gainst the mere love of fame,
A soul as loyal as my best compeers,
To worship Truth, and light from her clear flame,
The holy, quenchless torch of a poet's stainless name.

3

For never lightly have I touched the lyre,
Nor careless swept its music-storèd strings,

Too much it holds of true Promethean fire—
Too honoured are to me its utterings
Of Beauty's—Passion's—Love's sublimest things,
That ever I should feebly strive to waken,
With mere irreverent and vain desire,
My trembling song, among the songs unshaken,
That ages have not dulled, nor silence overtaken.

4

Oh, Poesy! where'er may be thy shrine,
I am the meekest pilgrim kneeling there.
This unskilled hand would scorn to pen a line,
These loreless lips would never, never dare
To break the quiet of thy temple's air,
Did not a wish, by thine own self implanted,
Within my bosom, like some flower twine
Around my heart, which like a thing enchanted,
Is fain to suck the sweets for which it long hath panted

5

Then let me handle, with a meekness meet,
My soul-awaking and celestial theme,
And quicken thou, with vivifying heat,
All trancèd instincts, that my verse may teem,
If not with music of Castalia's stream,
At least with something worthy of these days,
With numbers philosophically sweet,
And fearless—fearing neither blame nor praise,
But counting their reward the poet's fadeless bays!

1883.

A MIDNIGHT MEDITATION.

1

Fame, what art thou—a phantom of the brain?
A shape we build of fancies overwrought?
Hast thou a voice of sweet melodious strain?
And are thy words with fragrant breathing fraught?
Wearest thou smiles of love or looks distraught?
Art thou an arch enchantress, who dost feign
An outward beauty, captivating thought
And sense, and soul, until we feel the pain
That tells us thou art naught!

2

What vigils, and what labours, and what store
Of offerings we bring unto thy shrine!
The altars of the olden gods ne'er bore
Their lambs and goats, their fruits, their oil, and wine
More sumptuously than now thou bearest thine;
But Fame, I am forgetting, thou art hoar,
A hundred ages swear thou art divine,
Old Babylon made hymns to thee before
This hand dared pen a line!

3

Thou hast been waited on by mighty men,
Scipio and Hannibal's contending arms,

Homer's old verse, and Virgil's deathless pen
Have acted on thee like Medean charms;
For ever Ilion rings with Greek alarms,
And Paris woos as bravely now as when
He lulled fair Helen's conscience-pricking qualms;
And Cæsar's legions sweep the earth again,
From Gaul to Egypt's palms.

4

What can elicit from thy sphinx-like stare
The light of recognition? What compel
Thy trumpet tones to cleave the quivering air
With the clear rhythm that we love so well?
Loud approbation's grand triumphant swell!
Lame Œdipus would bid us not despair
The riddle may not be so hard to tell,
But as we wait, old age comes gaunt and bare
And Death looms vast and fell!

5

Why honourest thou the dead, whom living thou
Hast bound in penury, and laughed to scorn?
Why dost thou place upon the clay-cold brow
The wreath it should in happier times have borne?
Why makest thou fond Hope a thing forlorn?
And when the soul hath fled, with praise endow,
With light illumine, and with grace adorn
The very wisdom thou didst disallow,
When on the tongue 'twas worn!

6

Would that I had a prophet's mystic skill,
So that I might foretell, with thrilling tone,
The destiny that bounds the finite will—
The meed assured—the victory mine own;
So that I might peer fearfully alone
Into Time's dark abyss and drink my fill,
And feed my hunger with the yet unknown
Dim-veilèd mysteries of good and ill,
Of laughter or of moan!

7

Of what avail? The solemn silent years
Pass by with Winter's snow and Summer's sl
Old Helios sets and rises, and the spheres
In their vast orbits wax and wane serene;
And this mortality hedged up between
Doubts, fancies, aspirations, hopes, and fears;
Alas! how swiftly Death will intervene,
And cover up our triumphs and our tears,
In quiet churchyard green!

1883.

TO A HERO.

Suggested by the fate of a Crimean veteran.

" Honor the Light Brigade"—*Alfred Tennyson.*

Thou wast no Wellington, for mighty Fame
To write thy deeds upon our cottage walls;
Thou hadst no pride of ancestry, no name
To make more golden Wealth's luxurious halls;
No carvèd scutcheon on thy tomb recalls
Deeds that we would " not willingly let die,"*
And never, never falls
The pilgrim's shadow where thy ashes lie,
In unadorned repose and poor solemnity!

And yet, thou wast a hero; one of those
Who make us boast our English race is fed
With the same chivalry that scorned all foes,
When high Leonidas his Spartans led
To write in blood an epic never read,

* I might perhaps leave something so written to after times as they should not willingly let it die.—MILTON, *The Reason of Church Government.*

But what our hearts warm up to those who fought
And so great glory shed;
It seems some spark of freedom we have caught,
Too swift, too bright, too grand, too pure for modern
thought!

3

Yes, yes, thou wast a hero, true and brave
As ever saw red Death, and smiled him down
In the keen lunge, that made a warrior's grave
For him who fought against thy land's renown;
Yet thine was not the victor's laurel crown,
Imposing History could not mar her page
To chronicle a clown,
While large Achilles strutted on the stage,
And made almost sublime a too prosaic age!

4

Poor shade! not this, at stately Clio's hands
Thou askedst; no, thou wast not born to soar,
Thy life was woven of such home-spun strands
That honor's eminence had injured more
Than many a hard-won foughten field of yore!
Yet 'twould have been but kind, when strength was spent,
And thou wast lone and hoar,
Had Time with genial warmth some comfort lent
To rob thy last, sad years of Want's stern chastisement!

5

At least not doomed thy good staunch heart, whose fires
Gave Tennyson some fervour for his lay,

To fret its age's simple few desires
In scornèd, cheerless indigence, away
Beneath the pauper's sorry coat of grey!
At least not doomed thee to a pauper's crust,
And let the worn-out clay,
Whose soul, I ween, is sleeping with the just,
Sink to this common grave, a pile of pauper dust!

1883.

LAMENT OF THE OLD YEAR.

Right merrily ring the bells and fast,
A joyful peal to the starlit sky,
My sceptre is broken, my reign is past,
So what can an old year do but die?
The snows are falling, the air is cold,
With the keen, keen blast of the Winter wind,
The Summer is gone with his green and gold,
And the Winter only is left behind.
That timid maiden we call the Spring,
Who gave me her kisses when I was young,
Alas! for the song she was wont to sing,
And the promise that came from her lisping tongue;
Where now are the flowers that bloomed so gay?
Her silver dews and her plashing rains?
Her flowers are dead on the frozen clay,
And her showers are sunk in the frozen plains;
And Summer, Oh Summer, I loved him well,
With his bright blue eye and his gentle breath;
For sweet was the story he had to tell
As he whispered of plenty, and laughed at Death.
The haunts that knew him remember now
No longer the ring of his hearty mirth,

And the leaf hath dropped from the once full bough
To its cold, cold mother, the silent Earth!
Then Autumn came with his plenteous store,
But Autumn passed with the setting sun;
The grain will ripen for him no more.
His triumph is over, his day is done,
And Winter, the child of the snows and sleet
Is standing, shivering, waiting by,
I can hear the patter of tiny feet,
'Tis the young new year and the end is nigh,
The bells are ringing a peal so sweet,
'Tis time for the worn-out year to die!
But into the depth of my silent grave,
What secrets I carry of hopes and fears,
What vows of the beautiful, young and brave,
What wounded hearts, and what falling tears!
What deeds that the angels have joyed to know,
What sins that the angels have wept to see,
What laughter and misery, guilt and woe,
Ah would that its sorrow could die with me!
But there is good on the old Earth still,
And gentle souls that are free from guile,
Love touches the heart with as warm a thrill,
And beams for aye with as bright a smile.
The roses still bloom on the cheeks of youth,
And the lover who kisses the bright-eyed maid,
Ne'er bothers his head with the troublesome truth,
That her form must shrink and her charms must fade.
Why should he? The present's enough for him;
'Tis time to sigh when the board is bare;

Life's goblet is full to its crystal brim,
So away with the thought of a dastard care!
Drink up to the gods of Youth and Love,
Gaze into the depths of your lady's eyes,
They're soft as the glance of the turtle dove,
And clear as the summer's unclouded skies—
While over your wooing the bells above,
Are tolling the knell of the year that dies!

1883.

A VERY SIMPLE CREED.

There is true happiness in man's frail heart,
When Gentleness, like some bright goddess, sways
The rod of empire o'er each secret part,
And breathes her courteous mandates 'mid the maze
Of wild conflicting passions, hopes and fears.
I have no sympathy with teachers cold,
Who turn for truth and beauty to the spheres,
But callously ignore the manifold,
Deep, mighty mysteries of smiles and tears,
And heedlessly brush by the real gold
Of human goodness in these latter years,
As though it were a love-deserted theme,
Some valueless, rough dross they fain would deem
The inessential memory of a dream,
Or fable old.

2

Must all our admiration be sublime?
And all our passions so intensely strung,
That we must strive towards the stars to climb
And roll off weighty morals from the tongue?
Can we not see that ne'er at hand there spring
The unpretending virtues of our kind?

That gentleness is not so rare a thing
As we have oft within our souls divined ?
That Love, not always with an eagle wing
Soars to the skies, but oftener is enshrined,
With all his wealth of silent hallowing,
Deep in the kindred hearts that round us beat,
And lights the glances that our glances meet,
And tunes our brothers' voices to his sweet
True whispering ?

3

Alas ! I fear that cold Philosophy
Will frown upon my all too humble creed,
And, with contumely, proudly pass me by
As one who fain would sow too poor a seed.
Yet still amid the sharp quick throb of pain
That half anticipates some scoffing thrust
Of learnèd, cold, and critical disdain,
There springs the healing of a hopeful trust,
That this, my simple unaffected strain,
May here and there awake, as from the dust,
Some human heart to grateful beat again—
To feel that Earth and Earth's decaying race
Are things still breathing Nature's primal grace,
Diffusing love in their appointed place
And not in vain !

1883.

MORTALITY.

Mortality is pain
Of body, mind, and soul,
Of passions 'yond control,
Of yearnings that are vain,
Of thoughts that come amain
And outroll
O'er the garden of the brain,
Like mists upon a plain,
Their cloudly scroll;
Till the vision of the mind
Is blurred, and weak, and blind,
And we grope and cannot find
The longed-for goal
Of infinite heart-gladness,
That shall leave behind the sadness,
The anguish, and the madness
Of the soul!

Yet within us is a spark—
A heat—a fire divine—
That will live, and glow, and shine
Through the shadows dank and dark,

Like the signal of a barque
On the brine:
But we heed it not, nor mark,
Sister mine,
How we might have lashed it fast,
While the tempest hurried past,
To the strongest, tallest mast
As a sign
Of the truth of teachings hoary,
Boundless love and solemn story,
That man's eternal glory
Is divine!

Oh, Death, a sleep art thou,
An ever-flowing tide,
An ocean deep and wide,
A land, dark-hidden now
Beyond the sunny brow
Of Life's hill-side!
And 'mid orison and vow
We wonder as we bow,
Tempted—tried,
If the land beyond be fair,
And the spirits moving there
Are the souls of them that wear,
Purified
In a passionless renown,
The raiment and the crown
Of Him who journeyed down
For us and died!

TO AMY ON HER TWENTY-SECOND BIRTHDAY.

Oh, for a pen dipt deep in liquid love,
To write the strong affection of my heart!
Alas! such fairy gifts are far above
The reach of mortals, and the world's broad mart
Exchanges ne'er for silver and for gold
The wondrous prizes of lost fairyland,
That trustful Childhood, yearning to behold,
Finds fly the grasp of Age's strength'ning hand.
And yet although Titania's broken wand
Hath lost the airy lightness of her sway,
Though Mab and Oberon have passed beyond
The science and the culture of to-day,
There still exists a world of spirits bright
As those who erst in dewy woodland kept
Their dancing revels neath the moon-crowned night,
And held their court while grosser mortals slept.
Love is a fairy on whose sheeny wing
Are wafted all the secrets of mankind;
Ne'er yet the fondest, delicatest thing,
But fonder and more delicately shined
Through being breathed by Love, and him I send
From Ind's hot clime to whisper in thine ear,

A wish, that every blessing may attend
Each autumn day that marks thy natal year.
Each fleeting year that lengthens out thy life,
I would see honoured, happy, virtuous, free
From care and every carping worldly strife
At whose advance our happier instincts flee.
But words, words, words, oh, for one warm embrace,
One tender glance in Joy's bright tear enshrined,
Truth's beaming spirit kindling face to face,
And simple love on simpler lips entwined!
This bliss denied, then may my simple strain,
Like some pluckt flower, in lonely wildness born,
Still breathe afar from its own native plain
A fragrance steeped in all the dews of morn!

1881.

THE RAINBOW.

From the rolling earth and the lucent skies,
From the crests of mountains hoary,
From the countless stars that set and rise
Afar from the ken of human eyes,
I come in my airy glory!
From the silver East and the golden West,
From the ardent South's warm sighing,
From the crystal snows on the North's cold breast,
And the ice that gleams on his frozen crest
Where life and love lie dying!
I come with a sound no mortal hears
Out of cloudy caves above
When summer is raining his joyful tears
On the Earth his oldest love!

I come from the flowers besprent with dew,
I come from the airs that kiss them,
I've woven the violet's beauty through
The daisy's gold and the rose's hue,
But the flowers will never miss them!
And out of the mist that riseth slow
When the morning doth awaken,
I've sucked up fire through the airs below,

My loveliest tint and softest glow
From the cold grey mist are taken!
I come from the fields of waving corn,
And they feel a happy pain,
When to sun and shower the child is born
That was theirs and is theirs again!

In me is the wisdom of Youth and Age,
For bright to my airy prison,
The deepest thought of the wisest sage,
The lover's vow and the poet's rage,
And the sinner's prayer have risen.
I've stretched the breath of their woe and mirth,
Their sighs and their joyful laughter,
In a silent glory o'er sea and earth,
And mine is the life of immortal birth
The world is thirsting after!
For the song is sung or the tale is read,
But I alone may hold
The very breath of the living dead,
In drops of liquid gold!

The weary toiler in town and mart,
O'er his darkness sees me shining,
And a wish is born in his laden heart
Till the burning tears from his dim eyes start
With a hope beyond divining!
The children cease from their artless glee,
And fain for my beauty airy

Would merrily wander afar to see
And gather the gems they believe to be
The gifts of a woodland fairy;
But even then I am sworn to die
In my robes of rain and wind,
And only the rack of a storm-tossed sky
Are the ashes I leave behind!

1887.

GORDON.

Heroic Gordon! here I write thy name,
With all a soldier's homage on the page;
Yet know not whether the o'ermastering thought
That has invoked it, can with fitting speech,
Invest it with a worthy robe of praise.
For sure if ever name deserved to be
Set in our English verse and garbed in all
The earnest eloquence that flows from song,
That name is thine—if ever yet have flashed
From war's outrolling thunder the swift gleam
Of calm, heroic effort, steadfast—true—
To gentle peace and deeds of mercy pure;
Then know I not where we may look and find,
A nobler, purer, braver soul than thou!
'Tis said by some that now our manhood's pith
Of ancient chivalry and lofty aim
Is in the brightness of these modern days,
Withered and shrunken and of little worth;
But thou, at least, hast shown to all the world
That modern sons are worthy ancient sires,
Not less in deeds of daring than in love.
And all our youth at home, in England dear,

Or scattered o'er the world in foreign lands,
Will shrine thee in their hearts, and thou wilt be
One of our fireside heroes, and wilt make
Our very sons unborn lift up their heads,
And, while the blood of tingling ardour mounts
To their proud cheeks as they recount thy tale;
They will themselves be filled with high resolve
To emulate thy life, which never swerved
From the clear path of duty, even when
It led in lonely darkness to the grave!

1885.

THE SONG OF THE SPIRIT OF GAIN.

In leviathan London I stood,
The mighty, the million-tongued Babel,
And footsteps and voices like waves
Of the ocean were falling around me ;
The care-graven toilers of Earth,
The decrepit, the listless, the able,
Like a warm-streaming current of life,
In their eddies and surges enwound me ;
And their eyes gleamed with light that was fierce
And cruelly, ruthlessly eager,
Like the swift-licking flame that shoots up
Round the sleeper its quivering flashes,
When it comes in the stillness of night,
His hearth and his home to beleaguer,
To scare the bright dream from the brain
And burn the strong frame into ashes !

2

And methought, as I listened, there grew,
From out the tumultuous clamour,
A voice, like the voice of a god,
A sound like the tempest-born thunder,

That stole o'er my senses and strangely
My heart and my soul did enamour,
And filled me with sadness and awe,
And held me enravished with wonder.
For it seemed that its language was born
Of the language of man and of woman,
It seemed that the voices around me
Their heaven-tuned accents had blended.
To give it the rage of a fiend,
Though its woe and its pathos were human,
And thus from the city's vast roar
The song of the spirit ascended.

5

"Oh ye fools! ye have given me life,
Ye have fashioned me out of your sorrow,
Ye have fed me with pride and with tears,
The tears and the pride of heart-breakings;
And the hopes I devour to-day
Are the cares that I vomit to-morrow,
As I brood o'er your feverish lives,
And gloat o'er your hurried awakings.
Ye have made me a god and have sealed
With the seal of a fierce adoration,
The brows of the old and the young,
Till the lips of the child and the hoary,
Praise me as their rock and their Christ,
Their heaven, their hope, their salvation,
And render to me as their king,
The kingdom, and power and glory!"

"And ye come to the foot of my throne,
The throne that your fancies have builded,
And ye lay down your hearts in the dust,
As ye come with professions of duty,
To pawn your dear honour for dross,
That your nightmare of folly hath gilded
Into something as priceless as life,
And far passing life in its beauty!
Though your bosoms are cold without hearts,
And your manhood sans honour is blighted,
Lift up, oh ye opulent fools,
Your heads in your high habitations!
For, oh ye have learnt what it is
To be without honour delighted,
Ye are wise and your wisdom is gold,
And your gold is the envy of nations!"

5

"For the keen-witted wisdom of gold,
I ask but the instincts enfolden
In the opening bud of your lives,
As the perfume is shrined in the flower;
For the delicate beauty of love
I give ye a love that is golden,
And exchange the pure thoughts of your hearts,
For a cold and a glittering dower;
And ye love the new love and forget
How brightly the old did awaken,

With a smile that was born of the dream
She had seen in her innocent sleeping;
Oh! love your new love, for ye soon
From her amorous clasp shall be taken,
And the world will but smile at your lust,
As the grave closes over your weeping!"

1882.

LINES ON A CURL.

1

O curl, thy case, I vow, is surely vocative,
And thus I do precede thee with an O ;
" Lines on a curl" 's a title somewhat locative,
But it must pass, and will, as titles go,
In this lax age of drear æsthetic passion,
Be none the worse for being out of fashion.

2

O curl, the human head is full of fancies,
Strange moods and queerest oddities, but thou
Hast left the spot wherein such humour dances ;
And I'll beseech thee to enlighten now,
Upon a few most heart-absorbing topics,
A heart that is half stewing in the tropics.

3

Say, did thy mistress laugh when soft she clipt thee
From the dear head that is thy native home ;
Where she has brushed, and combed, and washed and
dipt thee
In china basin and the salt sea foam ?
Or did she seem with inward anguish smarting
At the unkindest cut of all cuts—parting ?

4

And was she well? And was her soft cheek rosy?
And had her laugh no undertone of care?
And that dear brow, where thou hast nestled cosy,
Was it serene,—without a shadow there?
And beat her heart with happy meditation,
As she sent thee towards thy destination?

5

I know thy answer, curl; thy voice is skilful
In tones of gentle, glad, bright womanhood,
And high resolve, and trust, and faith unwilful,
And human love, and love's eternal good—
As I have, curl, I know that thou hast parted
From one the purest—fondest—kindest hearted!

6

I'll change my tone. Now, curl, thou'st passed Brindisi,
Didst notice in thy journey to the East,
If France and Germany were *really* busy
Or Italy, the land of pope and priest,
In matters warlike? *Is* Europa quaking?
And who on Earth has caused this fresh awaking

7

Of horrid war? Peace hangs on open hinges,
Old Janus' temple should not have a door;
The land of Apis, pyramids and sphinges
Is scarcely worth the slaughter of a corps;
But, curl, *sub rosa*, Mars is my commander,
As once he was of Philip's Alexander.

8

But, curl, enough ; we will be closest friends,
Thou art cut off from Beauty and from Time ;
And younger tresses soon will make amends
For thy long exile to a foreign clime ;
E'en as our children, now in frocks and sashes,
Must warm the world when we are dust and ashes !

9

And if, when back to England thou returnest,
Thou find a tress of silver in thy stead,
Both thou and it shall be to me an earnest
Of happy days by true affection fed ;
And thou, and it, and she, and I shall be
Four links of life and love in this mortality !

1882.

THREE VOLLEYS.

Fire ! there's a volley gone up for his Queen,
Let triumph outswell in its rattle ;
The flash o'er his grave is an earnest, I ween,
Of the heart he'd have borne in the battle.
Into the grave
Sinks the young and the brave ;
He knew not of Glory,
And all that proud Fame will preserve of his name,
Is a barrack-room story !

Fire ! there's a volley gone up for his heart,
Though bowed to Earth's common subjection,
Yet still it had much of the lovelier part
That hallows all human affection ;
It knew not of fear,
It was quick to revere
The sorrows of others,
And early divined that the hearts of mankind
Were the hearts of its brothers !

Fire ! there's a volley gone up for his soul,
  What though to the grave he's descended ?
His spirit is speeding away to the goal,
  Life's marching-days, comrades, are ended.
    From Earth's trouble free,
    He is greater than we,
    In a knowledge supernal ;
For his wisdom is bright with the heavenly light
    Of the solemn eternal !

1883.

LINES.

Oh! for a legend, venerably old,
Not known to bard or sage or grave historian;
Deep-sunken in old Time's down-trodden mould,
Like the huge fragments of some fossil saurian;
Or like some priceless urn of bronze or gold,
Egyptian, Jewish, Roman, Indian, Dorian—
Whose loveliness with rapture might be told
To all the ears of this bright age Victorian!

What bliss it were to, from the dust of years,
Bring something nourished by the fine quintessence
Of mind most rare that, knowing no compeers,
Had glowed long since in its clear incandescence;
A very sun, illuminating spheres,
And giving life and gladness by its presence—
Leaving of all its million hopes and fears,
This one bequest—this type of evanescence!

Or were it but some faintly-cyphered scroll,
Telling again the glowing inspiration
That filled the temple of a Homer's soul,
And swept the strings of his imagination;

How would I love its music to unroll,
And give the listening world the grand creation,
Till it should seem the poet's spirit stole
Triumphant from the grave, in jubilation!

Or were it but some roundly-sculptured tale,
Some marble-written, chisel-graven story,
That could to me with lips and features pale,
Speak deathless eloquence of love and glory!
So that I might uplift the past's dim veil,
And from the twilight of the ages hoary,
Draw Beauty from a green Arcadian dale,
Or valour from a Titan-hero gory!

I sometimes think my hand will ever stray,
With all the music 'neath its fingers sleeping;
And that the years will ebb and ebb away,
And Youth's ambition fade in Age's weeping;
And Fame be deaf for ever to my lay,
Till, Lethe-like, within me shall be creeping
The numbing, freezing poison of decay,
In one dark chaos all my lonely fancy steeping!

1882.

LINES WRITTEN UPON ARRIVAL IN INDIA—1880.

Why should we care for Fortune's frown?
'Tis part of our probation;
And Life's a story written down
For our sole education:
Though once upon the lines we look,
Which are for us intended.
We cannot leave the solemn book
Until the tale is ended.

And we must read from Youth to Age,
But oh! it well behoves us
To closely mark the living page
That oft so much improves us;
For spite of each assiduous care,
And every fresh endeavour,
What once we scan unthinking there,
Is passed and passed for ever!

And though the tale may widely range
From gaiety to sadness;
I'll welcome each instructive change,
And keep through all a gladness,

That shall within the sombrest clause
  And most pathetic sentence,
See Wisdom's primal, mighty cause,
  And need of my repentance.

And when the Power of Love divine,
  To whom be all the glory;
Wills me to read the last long line,
  And leave the wondrous story;
May He to my poor human heart,
  For sure He did design it,
The power of lowly grace impart
  To cheerfully resign it,

With every record old and new,
  With every gentle action,
With all of false and all of true,
  Beyond the world's detraction;
With every line that tells of sin,
  Of gladness or of weeping,
To be embosomed safe within
  His own eternal keeping!

1880.

BOYHOOD.

Oh! Boyhood, sweet the subtle grace
That gathers round thy fair young brow;
That lingers in thy laughing face,
And makes thy memory tender now;
Oh! dear to cherish in the breast,
Far dearer than the world's cold praise,
The simple trust and happy rest
Of Boyhood's days.

There is a freshness in the morn,
A gentle breathing in the spring,
A hope that lives when bursts the dawn,
That gives the day its hallowing;
And man is purer, holier far,
Still less by passion's breath defiled,
And nearer where the angels are,
Through being once a child.

And if Dame Fortune smiling crown
Each toilsome effort with success,
Nor e'er bestow a lasting frown,
Upon Life's changeful happiness;
When pride o' wealth its lustre flings
And golden gilds the crumbling clay,
Oh! Boyhood's memory tender clings
As sweet as aye!

1880.

LINES WRITTEN ON MY 25TH BIRTHDAY.

I'm five and twenty, Amy, goodness gracious!
My exclamation's slangy, but veracious ;
For a most gracious goodness, I'll avow,
Through five and twenty years of earthly vanity,
Has kept alive this factor of humanity
Till now.
Life's sum's going on—division and subtraction ;
Success I may denominate a fraction—
A changing decimal,
Whose numerator seems, alas ! so small,
That I may dub it, sans remorse at all,
Infinitesimal !

But five and twenty, with a constitution,
That, holdeth in delectable solution,
Of Hope, and Love, and Happiness the bases,
Is worth, at least, a thousand of those golden
Triumphs of art, whereon may be beholden
Victoria's graces ;
Contentment isn't purchased at a banker's,
And modern Crœsus very often hankers,

Amidst his riches,
For but a moiety of that full stock
Of rustic health that glows 'neath Hodge's smock
And fustian breeches !

So five and twenty, here's my hand, young fellow
I'll never see thee more—but waxing mellow,
As Time brings on life's transitory seasons,
When Autumn hath a voice it hath not now,
And the ripe fruit is hanging from the bough,
For many reasons,
I shall look back, and feel that thou didst blend,
In thy full life, the counsellor and friend,
Who, sage and jolly,
Knew all the quips and cranks of youth's mad brain,
And laughed away the wisdom that is vain
Of its own folly !

1883.

WRITTEN IN ANTICIPATION OF LEAVING INDIA.

When I come back from other lands,
  From all my roves returning;
How sweet to clasp your outstretched hands
  With love and friendship burning:
And though old Time, perchance, hath left
  Some traces of his power,
No Time hath ever yet bereft
  True friendship of its dower,
Or stol'n the honeyed sweets from Love
  In full re-union's hour!

Full well I know how bright the glance
  That lurks 'neath Beauty's lashes,
When wit, and truth and love enhance
  The soul's divinest flashes
A thousand, thousand times beyond
  The worth of common greeting,
When hearts are full, and words are fond
  In all the bliss of meeting;
But, oh, alas! that human joy
  Should be so frail and fleeting!

Yet well it is that mortal lips
  Should have the golden leisure
To taste with eager, panting sips
  The sweets of Love's own measure;
So cease regrets, ye know not how
  Earth's merry banquet ceases,
Nor when the fleeting hour, that now
  The happy laugh releases,
Shall with a light and velvet touch,
  Dash Life's frail cup to pieces!

1883.

LINES ON A DEWDROP.

Creation of the sable-vested night,
The flickering stars at eve's chill, calm decay,
Smiled on thy birth, so beautiful and bright,
And bid thee greet the coming of the day;
Thou didst their bidding, and rejoicing prest
On Flora's bosom, soft, a liquid gem,
And amorous nestled in her rosy breast,
And shed thy tears around her fragile stem;
But earth soon claimed thee, and the sun's warm heart
Beguiled thee from the bosom of thy love,
She watched thy beauty and thy smiles depart,
And drooped her head despondent in the grove.

* * * * * *

Once more the little dewdrop trembling hied
To seek forgiveness in sweet Flora's arms,
For Sol had roughly cast the gem aside,
With all its dainty and bewitching charms;
Now full of sorrow, in the moon's pale ray,
For having pained his gentle love so much,
He clung and Flora shook him not away,
But softened, as of old, to feel his touch,
And took him to her heart and held him there,
Kissed the bright sorrow from his tearful eye,
And closed her leaves, so beautifully fair,
Around the little dewdrop of the sky.

1880.

THE DREAM CITY.

I saw a city in a dream,
   A city by the sea;
And over it a sky did gleam
   Of wondrous brilliancy;
And yet a fear o'ershadowed me,
   As though some horror stalked
Within this city by the sea,
   Beside me as I walked!

What columns of divinest form
   Sprang loftily to air,
What sculptures glowing, life-like, warm
   Adorned the friezes there,
Superbly beautiful and fair!
   Yet still it seemed there swept
A nameless spirit through the air
   That mocked me as I slept!

Fantastic shapes, majestic stones,
   Oh, ye were silent all!
I heard not man nor woman's tones
   Within that city wall;

No sound of laughter soft did fall
  Upon mine anxious ear;
But ye were sad and silent all,
  As the cold corse on the bier!

And then I knew that once a race
  Of mortals blithe and gay,
Within this kingly dwelling-place
  Had lived and passed away,
One sadly-wierd enchanted day!
  And to that sounding shore,
That race of mortals blithe and gay
  Came never, never more!

The heart is such a kingly home
  Set in a sunny clime;
Wherein sweet spirits blithely roam
  Endowed with hopes sublime;
But in the solemn after time,
  When Youth's bright hopes are fled
The kingly home in the sunny clime;
  Is a city of the dead!

1885.

LINES ON A SWORD

When first thy glittering blade I scanned,
  In solemn contemplation;
And lightly poised thee in my hand
  With youthful admiration;
What castles built I in the air,
  What deeds of valour fashioned;
When Life was as an angel fair,
  And Hope a voice impassioned!

But, ah! a tinge of sadness falls,
  At times athwart my musing;
When Mem'ry's tender voice recalls
  Thine oft ungentle using;
And fain I would that thou hadst staid
  Within thy scabbard's keeping;
Nor been, indeed, fond trenchant blade
  The cause of so much weeping!

But courage nerved my youthful arm,
  To wield thee in the battle;
When life was young and passion warm,
  Amid the cannons' rattle

By thee full many a thrust was turned,
  Full many a foe sent reeling ;
Ah! then I ne'er thy helping spurned,
  Nor racked this breast with feeling !

Thou'rt dented now and red with rust,
  Yet still thou canst remind me
Of those who fell beneath thy thrust,
  Before, around, behind me ;
And thou wilt live when I am dead,
  To mutely tell the story,
How many a gallant heart I led
  To reap a passing glory!

1880.

AT EVENTIDE.

The star, whose silver twinkling beam
Shines in yon azure sky;
Breathes through the softness of its gleam,
A nameless melody,
And exquisite sweet harmony
Of blended sympathies that seem
To say,—" we cannot die,'

"For we are Beauty's speaking soul,
Shrined in this blazing sphere,
Parts of the subtly-blended whole,
The gods themselves hold dear,
And worshipping revere;
As Time's broad ages rise and roll,
And roll and disappear!"

1881.

LINES.

There are some thoughts that ne'er to fulness grow,
Being such seeds of thought, that, one poor life
Is not enough to bring them to their flower:
There are some tears that never, never flow
Into the outer world of woe and strife,
But burst the weary heart with their pent power!

There are some faces ever, ever young,
For they have passed in youth beyond the blight
Of age to youth immortal, and their graces
Inspire with loving eloquence the tongue,
That we remember only the clear, bright
And fresh young beauty of those long lost faces!

1884.

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS.

Written for an Entertainment for the benefit of the orphan children in St. Vincent's Schools, Poona, December, 1885.

Ladies and gentlemen—we shall agree
On this one point, I think, that man, though clever,
Has much to learn—but one thing seems to be
Beyond his utmost study and endeavour,
Ponder it how he may. The problem deep,
That must for aye defy profoundest thinking;
Is how Humanity alive may keep,
Without the task of eating and of drinking.

We cannot do it. Sanguine souls have tried,
Only to be most painfully defeated;
We must have something roasted, boiled, or fried,
Or by some culinary process treated—
Or something—cooked or not, that will enable
Our brains and bodies to maintain life's tussle;
Which cannot well be done unless the table
Gives us the food to make our bone and muscle.

And Christmas is, *par excellence*, the time,
(You know the reason) when a hearty dinner
Has something in it of the true sublime,
Whether, for fasting saint or starving sinner;
And many of us in this room to-night,
Can with a thrill of happiness remember,
When we were children how we hailed the bright
Glad festive Christmastide of dear December!

And now, though "children of a larger growth,"
We still are fond of Earth's poor little people;
And they should know that love rings out for both
Themselves and us from every sounding steeple!
And so I thank you for your presence here,
And fain would add that olden salutation;
"A Merry Christmas and a glad New Year,"
To bring my prologue to its termination.

1885.

LINES

IN MEMORY OF MY FATHER.

I remember, I remember,
In the days of long ago;
How the lips of childhood kissed thee,
Ere the heart of childhood missed thee,
Smiling, I could not resist thee,
Thou wast dead, they told me so.
Ah! I knew not then of dying,
And I wondered at their sighing,
For I thought that thou wast lying
Sleeping, sleeping, long ago!

1880.

TO MY MUSE.

Most dear companion, most unselfish friend,
Who shap'st each humour of my changeful mind,
To thine own image, I would not pretend,
With protestations vauntingly defined,
To give a name so hallowed, if thou wert
Not something held above the vulgar reach
Of passing foibles, which, alas ! exert
Their hateful influence to assiduous teach,
But too successfully, their art to wean
Me from the shelter of thy tranquil ways
To fitful strive in other walks to glean
The fruits of folly in my youthful days.
Yet never can I careless leave thy side ;
Thy sweet enchainment cannot be forsworn,
Thy gentle pleading will not be denied,
And I must answer or in silence mourn.
Thy simple strain may ne'er evoke a word
Of approbation from the crowd refined ;
Thou may'st unknown, inglorious, unpreferred,
Fail in the field where others erst have shined ;
But shouldst thou never wrest the wreath from Fame,
Should Fortune from her frowning ne'er unbend,
We'll plod Life's road together still the same,
True to each other, faithful to the end.

1880.

LINES WRITTEN IN HOSPITAL.

All things mortal must decay,
  Time the truth enhances ;
E'en the bright and golden day
  Pales 'neath night's dark glances;
And the present builds the past,
  Swift the years are flying ;
Life is one transcendent, vast,
  And eternal dying.

Beauty fades 'neath Age's touch,
  Each dear love we cherish ;
And the things we prize so much
  At the last must perish ;
Man triumphant in his strength,
  Moulded in perfection ;
To the earth returns at length,
  'Neath the grave's subjection.

But there is a nobler life,
  Upwards ever tending :
Springing from this mortal strife,
  Joyful and unending.

Clad with never-ageing birth,
God in love hath given;
Soaring from the clay of earth,
To the saints in Heaven.

Take this lesson to thy heart,
Brothers take it kindly;
Never from this guerdon part,
Foolishly nor blindly;
Ye may be by Fate opprest,
Fortune may deceive ye,
But there is one sinless breast,
Yearning to receive ye,

Which hath felt the self-same woe,
Known the self-same anguish:
That ye might not faint below,
Nor disheartened languish.
Trust Him for His name is Truth,
Heed not idle scoffers;
Heaven's everlasting youth,
Is the meed He offers.

1880.

WRITTEN IN SPRING.

Oh! hawthorn-crowned and tearful smiling Spring,
With scarce the blush of Summer on thy days;
Thou'rt like the mistress unto whom I sing
A heart's affection and a lover's praise;
For sure thy sunshine is her happy smile.
That makes more beautiful an April tear,
Which only sparkles closer to beguile,
With many a dainty and alluring wile,
Our natures to thy fleeting beauties here.

Oh! soft-awaking perfume-laden Spring,
With Life's fair promise yet upon thy brow;
Thou'rt like the mistress unto whom I bring
Young Love attired with many a tender vow;
For sure the hope of Life's delicious zest,
When thrilled by youth's first amour, fond and shy,
Hath future summers reigning in the breast,
Sweet though unspoken, dear though unconfessed,
And future Springs to all eternity!

1880.

A SERMON IN SONG.

The rocks and shoals and shifting sand
So deftly laid by Fortune's hands,
Oh! brothers, heed 'em;
Nor let good resolutions rust,
And keep thy wits all free from dust,
For faith! ye'll need 'em.

A frame that glows with rosy health,
Is worth a pile of glistening wealth,
Though all don't know it;
But if ye'd garner length of years,
And reap an age undimmed by tears,
Oh! wisely sow it.

For health's a plant that man may train,
But, oh! beware the foolish strain
Of youthful passions;
For God in wisdom hath decreed,
That tender is the op'ning seed
Dame Nature fashions.

Among the fickle things of earth,
The truest test of all is worth,
I bid ye mind it;
Nor niggard count the labour lost,

For sure the prize repays the cost,
When once ye find it.

All true nobility depends,
Not on the poor conceit that ends
And half bewitches
With pride o' wealth and passing fame,
Through titled rank and gilded name,
The heirs o' riches.

But something subtler, purer far,
Determines where the instincts are
Of true gentility;
A touch of Nature o'er the ken
Of frail and weak-discerning men,
Must brand nobility.

Oh! Hope inspires and Faith sustains,
But all abiding Love retains,
The light of Life, Sirs;
Inspiring and sustaining still,
With nobler touch and gentler thrill,
Through darkest strife, Sirs.

Then, brothers, let thy faith entwine
Around each trustful hope of thine;
Her guardian power;
And place within their soft caress,
The beauty and the loveliness
Of Love's fair flower.

1880.

STANZAS ON AFFLICTION.

Man sorrows, for he seldom learns
To bear with full content,
The meed his passing folly earns,
The check divinely sent
To chasten, soften and to guide,
With wisdom and with care,
His loves into a purer tide,
More heavenly, more fair.

But oh! my brother, ask thy heart
If thou hadst never known
That sad and more pathetic part
Which swells Affliction's tone;
Couldst thou with sympathetic strain,
So perfectly incline
To pour thy pity on the pain
That beats akin to thine?

1880.

HEART SECRETS.

Could we but know the secret sin,
Shrined deep in many a throbbing bosom
Which like a canker gnaws within
The inward life, the outward blossom;
How vain were then the pomp of pride,
The fame of outward reputation,
To turn with magic spell aside,
The blinding overwhelming tide
Of earthly condemnation.

And could we know the secret tears
That silent weep the soul's contrition;
The prayers that reach no earthly ears,
Nor sigh for earthly recognition;
Methinks the bravery of mirth,
And winsome strain of dimpled laughter
Would seem of more pathetic birth,
To us whose fleeting span of earth
Is bounded by hereafter.

But all, at last, shall be revealed,
Though Faith, and Hope, and Love be shaken,

When Time's broad volume is unsealed,
And angel tongues the truth awaken;
Then shall we find each hidden grief,
Each chastening stern affliction given,
Adjudged by sorrow's martyr Chief,
The joy, the triumph, the relief,
And rest of Heaven!

1880.

IN SHADOW.

The dark desponding shade of Care,
What pen can paint, what tongue can tell?
But, ah! the gloom that gathers there
Is known, alas! too well! too well!
When o'er the spirit sombre flies,
The lowering demon of unrest,
Till every aspiration lies
Subdued and withered in the breast.

But not for aye: no, Heaven's decree,
And subtle union with Earth,
Has bid the saddening thought to be
Of lessening life, of fleeting birth;
And Hope divine ingrafted springs
From throbbing hearts and tearful eyes,
And glorious as an angel wings
Her flight of rapture to the skies.

Then, Care depart, thou living death,
Thou death in life of every aim,
Let Hope inspire the quivering breath,
And Faith the faltering heart reclaim;
And let the glance of Love be bright,
And let the smile of Love be fair,
To shield us from the starless night
Of blinding, maddening, fell Despair

1880.

A SUMMER DAY'S SONG.

I'm not a stern moralist, gloomy and grave,
With maxims and platitudes smooth on my tongue,
I'd rather, by far, tell the deeds of the brave,
And gleefully sing of the joys of the young;
And pour a libation as gushing and free,
As ever the gods and the muses approved,
To each sighing swain, who a lover would be,
And to each gentle maiden who yearns to be loved.

For, surely, the sunshine and blaze of to-day,
The eyes that are bright and the forms that are fair,
And the lips that might soften a stoic to pray
For a taste of the sweetness that's lingering there,
Are worthy a thought that shall spring from the heart,
And venting its sweetness in gladness and praise,
Ne'er turn to the time when these charms must depart,
Nor mourn for their beauty before it decays.

No! no! let the cynic, the stoic, the saint,
Be proof 'gainst the graces of beauty and youth,
Whatever their doctrines may teach them to paint,
As the very quintessence of wisdom and truth;
Contented I'll turn while the flower still rears
Its brightness, its sweetness, its bloom to the skies,
Nor sigh for its fate till the autumn appears,
Nor weep for its death till the bonnie thing dies.

1856.

YEARS AGO.

In spite of cynics, teaching,
And stoics, colder preaching,
The vow that trips,
From Beauty's lips,
When lovers are beseeching ;
Is treasured as a token,
Of Love sincerely spoken ,
Though years oft prove
The vows of Love
Are uttered to be broken.

Yet still the tones departed,
Which first mad passion started,
On Love's sweet lute
Are never mute,
Though sad and broken-hearted,
Droops Love's first endeavour,
In toils no years can sever,
To cherish still,
The old, old thrill,
For ever and for ever !

1880.

THE LAW OF LOVE.

I wandered where old Ichen's stream
Runs close to Winton's pile,
And gurgles to the sun's bright beam
Or woos Aurora's smile;
And many a dream of Hope rose fair,
And filled my mind the while.

And musing thus by Ichen's bank,
I watched her waters glide,
While sweet mine ear the music drank
Of her swift fleeting tide;
And many a bird from many a bough,
Sang love to me beside.

And while wrapt up in pensive thought,
And weaving fancies rare;
For youth's untutored instinct taught
My visions to be fair,
Of skies unsullied by a cloud
And hopes without a care,

There stole unto my side a mian
Of bent and agèd mien,

Whose years had distanced Nature's span
And left ten more between;
Whose sap of life had fled, but left
The hearty trunk still green.

"My son," his gentle voice outspoke,
"Why wanderest thou alone?"
And as his words the silence broke,
It seemed a prophet's tone;
One that a patriarch or saint
Or seer of old might own.

"Father," I cried, and framed my speech
Upon his first salute,
"Since thou my inmost of thought wouldst reach
My tongue shall not be mute;
And Age's deeper tones shall blend
With Youth's scarce-fingered lute.

"Father, my thoughts leapt wild and free
To future years on Earth;
And Fancy's fingets painted me
A glimpse of Pleasure's worth;
With many a scene of revelry
And gay, light-hearted mirth.

"And decked my smooth, unwrinkled brow
With Fame's unfading bays,
And sweetly whispered to me how
Ambition's gilded ways

Should be the paths in which to glean
The golden grain of praise.

"And led me by a willing hand
To Love's domain of joy,
And whispered on that rosy strand
No envious storms annoy,
Nor Beauty from her brightness wanes,
Nor endless pleasures cloy.

"Thus did my mind on Fancy's wing
Outstrip the Present's pace;
And scorning every earthly thing
I built myself a place,
Where love, ambition, beauty, fame,
Went hand in hand with grace."

"My son, I once was young as thou"—
The old man heaved a sigh—
"And Fancy then to me, as now
To thee she comes, came nigh"
He paused—methought a lonely tear
Stood glittering in his eye.

"And I a thousand plans built up,
A thousand plans of bliss;
And drank of Pleasure's madding cup
And Beauty's nectar kiss;
Ah! then the draught was sweet, my son,
Though sad the memory is.

"For time hath swept all, all away;
Once loved and cherished dear;
And hopes that decked Life's early day
Are odourless and sere,
As withered flowers in the chill
Dark winter time of year.

"But there remaineth still a gem
No hand of crumbling Age
Can rob from Life's worn diadem
And Mem'ry's chequered page .
A jewel pure, that shines above
All wreck that Time may wage."

"Oh! tell me, father, what the prize
That can for aye endure;
Which e'en to Age's dimming eyes,
Gleams radiantly secure,
Through every gale on Life's rough sea,
With glory bright and pure."

"My son there is a gentle bond,
'Twixt kindred souls on Earth,
Whose life can live and stretch beyond
The dust that gives it birth;
Whose meed of grace is grace indeed
Of more than passing worth.

The love that links two faithful hearts
In Life's encumbering chain,

And stedfast to its name imparts
Its sweetness to the twain,
Is the one thing for which to strive,
And striving, live to gain.

"For Fortune's smile may never fade
Through surging Life's career;
But oh! no smile can pierce the shade
That clings around the bier;
And all unnoticed praises fall
On Death's unlistening ear.

"But oh! if thou have loved, there springs,
When Life resigns her throne,
A seraph clad with angel wings
To guide thee to thine own,
That thou mayst rest in heaven at last
But not unblessed, unknown.

"That thou mayst find a kindred life
In sympathy with thine,
Beyond the world's unceasing strife,
And Death's grim border line,
Is Love's great law, which issues from
Love's centre, Love divine."

He ceased—and while his words still hung
Like music in the air;
Swept from a harp Æolian strung
To melody most rare,

I turned, and he who lately spoke
Now stood no longer there.

And I have travelled Arctic seas,
And roamed the torrid line,
But never sweeter words than these
Have charmed these ears of mine,
Than "Love's great law, which issues from
Love's centre, Love divine."

1880.

PHŒBE.

Pensive she sat beneath the woodland shade,
A gentle, trusting, and a beauteous maid;
A woman hardly, though the girl was flown,
Nor girlhood yet to womanhood was grown,
But just the age when nature seems most fair,
Most full of beauty, most devoid of care;
When Youth's warm bosom hath not learnt to sigh,
When innocence gives brightness to the eye,
And clothes each thought with simple ecstacy.

And yet one came not—she had waited long;
The wild exuberance of happy song,
That first beguiled the tedious hour had died
From those fair lips, and now the maiden sighed;
Swift throbbed her heart, her gentle bosom heaved,
To think that he whom she so true believed,
Should dally with Affection's sweetest flower,
And lonely leave her in the evening hour
Disconsolate within her woodland bower.

Doubt, doubt! how soon thou risest in the breast,
How swift thy whisper bids adieu to rest,

One glistening tear, wrung from the heart's quick pain,
Stole down her cheek—unable to restrain,
Poor Phœbe let her grief assert its sway,
Nor strove to drive the voice of doubt away;
But hark! a voice swift lulls her heart's alarms,
A sturdy lover clasps her in his arms,
Dries up her tears and kisses back her charms!

1880.

A RETROSPECT.

Oh! where are the friends of my youth,
The gallant, light-hearted and gay?
Ah! Time has been ruthless, forsooth,
And the fingers of shrunken Decay
Have fashioned their forms to her mould,
With a faithfulness truly unkind;
For the past is a tale that is told,
A legend whose zest is declined.

For! hushed is the laughter that rang
With a sweetness that ne'er came amiss,
In the days when Love joyfully sang,
And Beauty was wooed with a kiss;
When we lived on the present to dote,
And scorned the swift shadow of Time,
For the future was something remote,
And the present in all was sublime.

But, alas! for humanity's fate,
Our present was weaving a past,
And Age though he compass us late,
Dawns full and serenely at last;

Yet, methinks, in his tremulous voice,
There's a whisper I can but revere,
As he tenderly bids me rejoice
O'er the promise he breathes in my ear.

For he tells me the frail clay of Earth,
But confines the pure spirit within,
And he bids me awake to a birth
Undefiled by mortality's sin;
Where the soul may unfettered arise,
And on pinions immortal outpour
Her song in a land that defies
The wreck of mortality's shore.

1880.

LINES ON A FLY CAUGHT IN A SPIDER'S WEB.

Thou foolish, struggling, buzzing thing,
In what a sorry plight art thou!
Each flutter of thy fragile wing
Is rendered unavailing now;
The silken toils that shone as bright,
As silver threads in perfumed air,
Were treacherous in the fairy might
That clothed each hanging fibre there.

Yet, stay! I can no longer chide
Thy blindness to a tempter's wiles;
For man like thee with foolish pride,
Presumptuous grows when Fortune smiles;
And heedless turns with eager haste,
In spite of Wisdom's warning tone,
The easy sins of life to taste
And make their wretchedness his own.

And if a soul with reason blest,
Shall even then be insecure,

Against the joys seductive pressed
In Pleasure's soft beguiling lure,
Why, surely, I must lenient be,
Nor judge with too severe a strain,
So thus, poor captive, thou art free,
To start thy little life again.

1880.

SYLVIA.

When Ceres' horn o'erflows apace,
And mellow grain stands high afield ;
When Phœbus runs his longest race
Across the heaven's azure shield;
When nights loom fair for Love to teach
His pupils how to plight their troth,
With hearts made happy each in each,
Though faith ! he sometimes cheats them both.
Oh ! Sylvia, oh ! Sylvia,
I wooed, and she
Said gaily that her heart was free.

When reapers bend 'neath golden sheaves,
And harvest moons hang large and low ;
When swallows fly from drowsy eaves,
And huntsmen wind the tally ho !
When sleepy cattle love to blink
At Phœbus from the woodland glade,
And round-cheeked apples bashful wink
Disdain from overhanging shade,
Oh ! Sylvia, oh ! Sylvia,
I wooed, and she
Professed to doubt my constancy.

When icicles like silver spears
Hang stark from many a rimy ledge,
When grey's the cloak the welkin wears
And white's the robe that decks the hedge;
When still's the plough that turned the clod
And hoar's the year with Winter's rime,
Nor e'er a daisy specks the sod
To speak to us of summer time,
Oh! Sylvia, oh! Sylvia,
'Mid blushes said,
She was too young a maid to wed.

When daisies deck the gay green mead,
And bright-hued bows span weeping skies,
When peers the bud from out the seed,
To gaze on Earth with wondering eyes;
When birds to build their nests begin,
And choose the mate to rear their young,
Why, then, I strove once more to win
With youth's desire and Cupid's tongue,
My Sylvia, my Sylvia,
And she, and she,
My bonnie maid, accepted me.

1880.

TO RELIGION.

All hail, Religion ! child divine,
  Of Revelation's sacred cell,
This feeble meed of praise be mine.
  Thy power to prove, thy worth to tell.
Forgive, nor chill with cold disdain,
  The hand that would indeed aspire
To wake a faint and trembling strain
  Upon the Muse's ancient lyre,

To thee the guide of early years,
  To thee the solace of our prime,
When Sorrow hath bequeathed her tears,
  To glisten on the page of Time ;
Thine was the voice that lulled our cares,
  Thine was the staff when sore distressed,
Thine were the hopes and thine the prayers
  That soothed and comforted the breast.

'Tis not the anthem's echoing peal,
  Nor sounding speeches learned and long,
That will thy truest life reveal,
  And wake thy purest note of song ;

I've seen, nor blush to own it here,
  Thy sacred presence less defiled,
When robed in fond Affection's tear,
  Or worshipped by a lisping child,

Than in the swinging censer's breath,
  Than in the sign devoutly made
Than in the deftly-fashioned wreath,
  On silken pall remorseful laid;
The outward semblance Faith allows,
  The stamp that fashion gives to creed,
The keenest sorrow disavows,
  The purest worship scorns to need!

1880.

WRITTEN UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

Were only our poor hearts as light,
As ofttimes are our empty purses,
We'd sneer at Destitution's blight,
And laugh at Poverty's lean curses;
For Fortune is a fickle jade,
Oh! would that we knew how to take her,
And bravely woo the bashful maid,
That all her coyness might forsake her.

Oh! would that we knew how to snatch
A golden kiss when she's disdainful,
And would that we knew how to catch
Her smile without an effort painful;
And would that we knew how to lure
The wealth o'er which she fondly lingers,
To glitter and to rest secure
Between our own poor itching fingers.

Alas! we have to blame ourselves,
And soundly curse our wasteful folly,
And own that human nature delves
And toils to ripen melancholy;

For oft we let unheeded slip
  Life's pregnant and most golden chances,
Till Fortune's rays for ever dip
  Beyond our most ambitious glances.

And as the snowflake melts away,
  When Sol's bright beam too warm encroaches,
Or as the star's fast dwindling ray
  Is lost in rosy morn's approaches;
So wealth puts on a pair of wings,
  When wild profusion prompts endeavour,
And oft they are such airy things
  The birdie flies away for ever!

1880.

HYMN TO CHARITY.

Oh! Charity, fair maid divine,
Could this frail trembling muse of mine,
A guerdon of affection twine
For thy pure brow,
I'd loose my tongue to make it thine,
Yea, even now.

But, ah! the sweetest, gentlest thought,
The tend'rest, holiest passion wrought,
By reverential instinct taught,
On voice to raise;
Could, but alas! fall far too short
To sound thy praise.

Yet the sweet influence of thy smile,
Free from the merest taint of guile,
So strong in every tender wile,
So true, so kind,
Hath chased each thought that might defile
From out my mind.

And thus I'll guide my faltering tongue,
To sing what might perchance be sung,

By wisdom far more deftly hung,
Free from all slips;
Though ne'er was strain more earnest wrung
From worthier lips.

My heart's no more than human mould,
Too weak, alas! from sin to hold,
But, ah! it would indeed be cold
Beyond compare,
Could it ignore what thou hast scrolled
So kindly there.

Could it forswear thy pleading tone,
Could it in selfishness disown,
Or niggard be alas! too prone
To all disprove
The creed that thou hast made thine own,
Through boundless love.

But, oh! it pains my heart to see,
The smooth deceit that mimics thee,
And garbed in black hypocrisy,
But apes thy name
To render all its actions free
From Censure's blame.

That piles its offering on the plate,
Strong in its pride, stiff-necked, elate,
Not to relieve Affliction's state
Or Sorrow's tear;
But to restrain the world's debate
And fashion's sneer.

And from its own exalted place,
Whilst giving, can presumptuous trace,
Among its own created race,
Of kith and kin,
Its own sublime transcendent grace
And their great sin

Oh, Charity! the golden glint,
That apes thy form, nor stoops to stint,
Nor stays to spend might take a hint,
Free from asperity,
From Him whose life was one long print
Of pure sincerity.

1880.

A REPLY TO CENSURE.

Judge not the frailties of a fellow creature
By the stern dictates of o'er virtuous thinking ;
For that nice gauging of a faulty feature
In other natures, is an act unlinking
Thine own imperfect and distracted being
From the free hope of Heaven's blest salvation,
In that a Power moves which oft is seeing
In thee black sin where thou scarce not'st temptation.

Could'st thou but take the measure of thy follies,
And justly poise the balance of thy vices,
Or analyse thy joys and melancholies,
Made sad by Care or gay 'neath Hope's auspices
Could'st thou uprightly pass through life untainted
By the foul touch of sinful ones around thee,
I'd own thee born a blest creation sainted,
And Heaven thank for having only found thee !

But the crisp moral rolling from thy speeches,
The fierce denouncement thy rude tongue would proffer,
Almost constrains, in spite of what it teaches,
Me to be made a forced, unwilling scoffer
Of that pure life which man, alas! can never
Hope to uprear on his poor human nature,
Till the deep taint cf sin is lost for ever
In Heaven's love and Love's pure nomenclature.

1880.

TWO ARROWS.

Love took him an arrow tipped with worth
Of Passion and Truth sincere;
"Ha! ha!" quoth he, in his jovial mirth,
As he sent the shaft to the realms of Earth,
"Here's something the child of the lowliest birth
And the highest will sure revere;"
But his joy declined, for man was blind,
And the hope so tender, but sadly shined
Through a bright and a glistening tear.

Then Love from his quiver revengeful drew
An arrow all tipped with gold,
And the tiny shaft from his bowstring flew
With aim so deadly and mark so true,
That swiftly he vanquished and ruthless slew
Hearts, hearts a thousand fold;
"Then this" quoth he, "is the weapon for me,
And man from its power shall ne'er be free
As long as the world grows old!"

1880.

TO CHELSEA SUN DIAL.

Thou mute recorder of the hours,
How many eyes have marked thy shade,
And thought of Time's relentless powers,
In such a simple guise arrayed!
Here in the busy haunts of life
Thy presence must awake a thought,
With solemn contemplation rife
To those who scan thee as they ought.

Here childhood with a laughing face,
Trips by nor heeds how short a span,
Can cordon round the fleeting race
And changeful destiny of man;
Here youth expectant gaily wends,
On Love, Ambition, Pleasure bent,
Nor notes how swiftly Life expends
Its substance till the grain be spent.

Perchance the eyes of tottering age,
That bent and feeble passes by,
Look up on thy relentless page,
The index to Eternity;
And see reflected on thy dial
More than the passing time's release,
The goal of every earthly trial
And shadow of eternal peace.

1880.

A WHISPER OF NATURE.

There's many a flower wildly springs
And blossoms modestly alone,
Whose beauty ne'er a poet sings,
Whose dainty fragrance ne'er is known;
Whose op'ning bud, perfection fair
Whose Summer's prime and still decay,
But tremble in their native air
And all unnoticed fade away.

There's many a prayer no sounding aisle
E'er wafts its columned length along,
Nor decked with Ceremony's smile
Its simple melody of song;
And many a pregnant deed of love,
And many a glance that sparkles kind
Have not a bard their worth to prove
Nor leave a history behind.

Yet think not that the cunning hand
Of Nature hath been turned in vain,
To sweetly grace the brooklet's strand,
Or deck the vast and rugged plain;

Or fling athwart the rustic hedge
And low sequestered nooks of Earth,
Beauty's unsullied privilege
And gentle heraldry of birth.

And deem not that beloved the less
Because no meed of Fame proclaims,
Are deeds whose hallowed happiness
No taint of worldliness defames;
For angel eyes can pierce through space,
And gentle actions savoury rise
On golden wings of heavenly grace
To soar untarnished to the skies.

1880.

TO THIS BOOK.

(Written in a young lady's Album.)

Mayst thou gather twixt thy covers
  Happy thoughts of gentle lovers!
Venus, with her doves and sparrows,
  Laughing Cupid with his arrows
Are the deities eternal
  That shall keep thy pages vernal,
And to young and old commend thee
  Whither Fate may ever send thee.
Life, alas! is not all kisses,
  Matrons, bachelors and misses
Have, ere this, however simple,
  Found a drama in a dimple,
And led on by Master Cupid,
  Danced a merry dance—but stupid.
So, besides this master passion,
  Which is never out of fashion,
It perhaps were wise and witty,
  That, between each lover's ditty,
Some grave matter be debated,
  Cunningly interpolated,
Standing like a staid recorder
  Just to keep the rest in order!

I'll not hope to see thy pages
  Written in by wits and sages ;
Wit and wisdom, to be candid,
  Easily may be demanded;
But the world perversely jolly,
  Opens out its arms to Folly,
Scorning thoughts of what comes after
  For the melody of laughter,
And, with lips apart and smiling,
  Listens to the elf's beguiling.
This, perchance, is wisdom truly,
  Though it be a shade unruly.
So, be thou a volume sprightly,
  Bearing all thy honors lightly,
Holding it thy bounden duty
  To make welcome Love and Beauty ;
And I vow a ruse so clever,
  Must make thee, "a joy for ever."

1886.

SONNET.

IN MEMORY OF JOHN KEATS.

Poet of dreamy, soft deliciousness ;
In whose rich heart and richer-teeming brain
Beauty enthronèd sat, with all her train
Of old world fable in so fair a dress,
That lived and breathed the golden age again !
I cannot think of thee without a thrill
Of wondrous sweet though bitter, bitter pain,
Thou tenderest singer of warm youth and love ;
Too soon Death took thee to his cold domain !
But Fame hath placed thee high—a star above
This world's low mists—in sky without a stain ;
And thou art waxing clearer, greater still,
And never, never, never shalt thou wane,
The great Earth loves thee well—and ever will !

1886.

SONNET.

To Amy.

Methinks, I have been sad, dear girl, too sad,
And held too long a tearful dalliance
With Melancholy, till things bright and glad
Lost their clear beauties, and the utterance
Of all my heart was vain, and proud, and mad
And full of phantasies of moody trance:
But there are faeries skilfully adept
In stanching all the tears of Time and Chance;
And one swift-limbed into my heart hath crept,
Before whose gentle, innocent advance,
Passion sank down with closèd lids and slept,
And Joy's light laugh drowned Care's dull dissonance,
Till gloomy thoughts and shapes of sorrow fled,
Like howling beasts at morn by day discomforted.

1883.

TEMPUS FUGIT.

I'll take up my harp, and I'll sound a sweet strain
That shall bring back the land of my birth once again,
The faces that earliest smiled on my mirth,
And the voices that gave all the music to Earth ;
When Childhood, like morning, was gilding the skies,
When the hope of to-day was to-morrow's surprise,
And even the showers knew better than dare
To come without rainbows to hang i' the air.

Ye charms of my boyhood, oh Muse, what a theme !
Though since, I've been told they were only a dream ;
For years will bring knowledge, and knowledge will shew
Precisely the things that we don't want to know ;
To wit—that our marbles, our toffee and tops
Are matters far less than the weather and crops,
And thus we are doomed to resign to the past
The blisses too sweet and too fragile to last !

1883.

DOLCE FAR NIENTE.

To lie upon one's back and dream bright dreams
Through the soft haze of fond imagination,
Till the young Present, like a new world teems
With forms as light as fairies in creation;
To take old Time's slow scythe from out his hand
And reap down years with Youth's swift expectation,
And build, like old Alnaschar in the story
Exultant fanes of meditative glory;

This is a poet's privilege, my sis,
Wisdom may knit her clear brow reverential,
And vow that Folly holds his court in this
Most shadowy, most fleeting, inessential
And lazy-lit seraglio of the mind,
But, Wisdom, Wisdom thou art consequential,
And I am light of heart and three and twenty
And deep in love with "dolce far niente."

1881.

LINES.

Written on receiving a Book of Quotations from my Sister.

Here is a book, ye authors note its worth,
Three hundred poets flourish in its pages;
Who, doomed to pay the common debt of Earth,
Have left behind to all succeeding ages
The wit, and worth, and eloquence that gave
Their muse a lease of tuneful life immortal;
For though their bodies moulder in the grave,
Their souls have never seen its dreary portal,
But bless the Earth, defying in their rhyme,
All Change's fleeting, mystic variations,
Till Homer is a bard of present time,
And Shakspere poet-laureate by quotations!

1883.

YOU AND I.

When you were five and I was ten
How golden seemed existence then!
For life was as a rosy sky
In which the morning star shone high.
The winding road in mist was wrapt,
The far-off hills with mist were capt,
And in the valley bright with dew
The buttercups and daisies grew;
While filtering through the perfumed air
The sunshine glittered everywhere!

When you were ten and I fifteen
How great the gulf that yawned between!
I thought myself near manhood's whirl,
And you were quite a little girl.
My ways and yours were far apart,
I hated girls with all my heart;
A cricket match, a college prize
Were things immortal in my eyes,
But as for little girls of ten,
I thought them quite a nuisance then!

When I to twenty years was grown,
And you had fifteen summers known;

There came a change I guessed not why,
Nor how it made me feel so shy.
I only know my thoughts began
To leave that noble creature man;
And yet the bliss I fain would seek
Brought burning blushes to my cheek;
I scribbled then in love-sick rhyme
And thought myself a bard sublime!

When I was twenty-five and you
Had numbered twenty birthdays through,
Alas! for transitory things,
Life's winters, summers, autumns prings!
I found myself a toiling slave,
But Fortune then one jewel gave,
The gem of all the world's broad mart,
A woman's trusting tender heart;
All carping cares we soared above,
For you and I were deep in love!

When thirty years from me were fled
And Time upon your shining head
Had spread his wings for twenty-five
What bliss it was to be alive!
For then was Fate completely good
And gave me thy full womanhood.
Oh Youth! oh Time! oh Love! oh Life!
A dearer name than all is wife;
For they are joys that stand alone
But she is every joy in one!

Go Time, we bid thee faster fly,
We heed thee not, my wife and I;
Go Youth, we scorn thee, thou art flown
But Childhood's youth is round us grown.
Here's to its eyes, its sunny curls,
God bless our boys, God bless our girls!
They'll be earth's lovers, sweethearts, wives,
God bless their hearts—God bless their lives!
And oh! where'er they live and move,
God's blessing on their human love!

1886.

MY FRIEND, THE INDIAN EDITOR.

I see him in his littered room,
A man of seven or eight and thirty;
The ceiling sadly wants a broom,
The carpet's old and torn and dirty;
The cobwebs have, for two monsoons,
Been growing thicker, stronger, wider,
And now they stretch in dun festoons,
The haunt of many a crafty spider.

The room is large, but mean and bare;
A plain deal table in the middle,
A dirty lamp, a hard-backed chair,
And, on the wall, a bow and fiddle;
A bedstead in the corner stands,
While on an ancient blackwood teapoy,
There rests a clock without its hands,
And there the model of a sepoy.

There's not a picture on the wall,
My friend, though born with tastes æsthetic,
Found Pitman, early, all in all,
And merged all art in art phonetic.

His library I recollect,
Had in it, "How to train our daughters,"
A novel, called, "The wrecker wrecked,"
And someone's "Hints to young reporters."

A tattered Virgil on the floor,
Was being played with by a kitten:
And Shakspere lay beside the door,
With half his sonnets insect-bitten.
He had a dictionary too,
But that began at "B" and ended
Before it reached to "W,"
Somewhere, I think, about "untended."

And there were papers, magazines,
From Cincinnati unto Burma;
The fruits of half the press machines
That man has placed on *terra firma*;
His gum was very clear and strong,
And even now, in mem'ry lingers,
How bright his scissors seemed, and long,
And how he grasped them with his fingers!

His face was of a xanthic tint,
A sort of dirty yellow ochre;
His eyes had just the faintest squint;
He was an everlasting smoker:
His lips were colourless and dry,
As if parched up by thirst eternal,
And though he was a man most shy,
He was a hero in his journal.

From dry champagne to Hollands gin,
He had a fine absorbent throttle;
He held it for a deadly sin,
To leave a drop within a bottle;
And so it came his eye was moist,
His nose was oddly variegated;
And he was weak and raven-voiced,
And every night intoxicated.

But he would write a thousand things,
From "locals" up to stirring leaders;
On policies of queens and kings,
On army corps and special pleaders;
All subjects underneath the sun,
Were treated by him *con amore*;
From fashions to the last big gun
Or all the freaks of Whig and Tory.

He had a quick and ready tongue,
Knew many a language oriental;
The ditties that by him were sung,
Were always mild and sentimental;
And when he took his bow in hand,
He tuned his fiddle in a minute;
And quickly made you understand,
That really there was music in it.

Long years ago he'd mastered Greek,
From Aristophanes to Plato;
The Latin that he used to speak,
Was that of Cicero and Cato;

And yet, the bright impulsive mind,
So subtle, keen and swift in thinking,
Went down like hundreds of its kind,
The weakest, weakest prey to drinking!

Death comes to all: to him it came;
'Twere well, methinks, to gently leave him;
Go, read upon his tomb, his name,
The earth was kind that did receive him!
But preach no moral o'er his grave—
Be neither wise, nor stern, nor witty;
For if he had a soul to save,
Oh, brother, have a heart to pity!

1888.

A MODERN LOVER'S COMPLAINT.

'Twas said of old that, Love is blind;
  And blind he seems for all my fancies,
That long have pictured him inclined
  To answer my impassioned glances.
I've worshipped him with many sighs,
  And spoken him with gentle wooing,
But not a whisper he replies
  To all my amatory cooing!

I've waltzed with him at happy balls,
  And lived with him for weeks together
In lowly cots and stately halls,
  With heart as light as any feather;
I've coaxed him with a thousand wiles,
  And used up every lover's token
To catch the brightness of his smiles
  And vows that never have been spoken.

I've walked with him in shady dells,
  When nightingales were sweetly trilling;
When 'neath the langour of his spells
  My pulses with delight were thrilling;

But with a gesture full of grace,
  (Why were his limbs so fairly moulded?)
He swift was gone with laughing face
  And both his pretty wings unfolded!

And now, alas! I'm growing old,
  Youth's first bright visions are departed;
I've seen so many bought and sold
  So many languish broken-hearted;
That, after all, I feel inclined
  (Although the thought affection narrows)
To vow that Love, because he's blind,
  Had better lay aside his arrows.

I feel his tantalizing darts,
  And, truth to tell, had I been given
A score or two of human hearts,
  They would, by this time, all be riven;
I'm scarcely certain as I write,
  ('Tis not the slightest use complaining)
But I believe, if not gone quite,
  I've very little heart remaining!

It's all been shot away in fact,
  Great Hymen! you're the god of marriage,
The fragments might be made intact—
  My bride when blushing in her carriage,
Would never in her inmost soul,
  Debate the awkward question whether
Her husband's heart were quite a whole,
  Or only pieces joined together!

Or if she were to, she would find
  The thing so cunningly cemented
Had all the instincts true and kind
  That make this kissing world contented ;
So Hymen search the world around,
  And let young Cupid sly and clever
Admit when all my heart is found,
  'Tis every bit as good as ever !

1882.

STANZAS.

Oh! bonnie Spring, oh! bonnie Spring,
How sweetly doth the throstle sing,
How blithely sweeps the swallow's wing
O'er woodland, marsh, and meadow;
How glad doth summer's promise cling
Round bud and length'ning shadow.

Oh! bonnie Spring, oh! bonnie Spring,
I will not breathe an unkind thing,
Against the clouds that sometimes bring,
Moist April's lamentations;
For spite of all, thou'rt still the king
Of all the year's creations.

Oh! bonnie Spring, oh! bonnie Spring,
Would that my humble muse could sing
An echo to the hallowing
That gilds the year's young hours;
But, bonnie Spring, the wishful thing
Mocks all my poet powers!

1880.

WRITTEN ON A BIRTHDAY CARD.

What kisses now? Ah! wherefore not?
And love from miles and miles away?
Why love hath never left the spot,
My sister, where thy footsteps stray.
For kindest, tenderest, fondest heart,
For ever beating warm and near,
We two have never been apart,
But both are there and both are here!

Thou gentle sister, take my hand.
Oh, happy eyes!—yes, these are tears;
That tears that love can understand,
When love has longed and longed for years!
What care we if our cheeks be wet
When memory with a touch sublime,
Can almost make us both forget
All fortune, distance, change and time!

1886.

LINES WRITTEN ON A BIRTHDAY CARD.

A birthday's like a hundred things
Of which the lightest scribbler sings:
A milestone on Life's dusty road,
Another room in Time's abode,
Another link to lengthen out
A chain we twist and twirl about,
Another drop within the cup
That Fate presents and we drink up.
Then here's to thee, thou faithful friend,
May all life's mile-stones only tend
To lead thy feet where all around
Fair sights shall be and pleasant sound.
May all Time's rooms be chambers sweet,
Where friendship, joy and love may meet.
May life's fresh links be links of gold
And brighter grow as they grow old,
And may thy cup of life long be
A bowl of bright felicity!
Thou kindest soul, whom I have known,
Thou friend when other friends have flown,
Dear heart so true through many years
Through all my joys, through all my tears,

Hope on, hope aye—we yet shall grasp
Each other's hand in friendly clasp
And with a kiss laugh Time away
As though the years were yesterday!

1886.



SONGS.



THOU ART NOT OLD.

Thou art not old, my gentle wife,
  Thou art not old to me;
Thou hast the same unchanging heart
  As when I courted thee!
And oft when twilight's peaceful hour
  Steals over hill and plain;
And we are sitting side by side
  Or walking down the lane;
It seems to me that thou and I
  Are young, young loves again!

Thou art not old, my faithful wife,
  Though many a sun's decline
Hath stol'n the light that day might love
  From those dear orbs of thine!
Thou art not old, though thin and few
  The locks around thy brow;
And shrunk the graceful form that Time
  But gave, to disavow,
For love hath shaped thee to a mould
  That nought can alter now!

Thou'rt like the sky that brightly smiles,
  As deep, and blue and fair,
As when the bounteous hand o' Love
  First stretched its curtain there!
Thou'rt like the very tale of love,
  That aye through Time has rolled,
And by a million, million lips
  To myriad hearts been told,
And never yet hath lost its charm
  And never can grow old!

1882.

A TOAST.

Here's to the maidens, the matrons and all
The blithe bonny women that people our isle;
May adversity ne'er on their happiness fall,
And long may the sun on their loveliness smile;
Then mothers, and sisters, and sweethearts and wives,
High up to the brim let it gallantly pass!
For ne'er lived a soldier, my rollicking boys,
But whose special right
Was to drink and to fight,
And fall deep in love with a merry-eyed lass!

Here's to the bowl, round whose glistening rim,
The jest, and the laughter, the friendship of years
Have rolled out their tide like a bright social hymn,
And softened our sorrows and dried up our tears!
A fig for the croakers that sneer at our glee—
High up to the brim let it gallantly pass!
For ne'er lived a soldier, my rollicking boys,
But whose special right
Was to love and to fight,
And drink all good liquor that glints in his glass!

1884.

NANCY.

Oh! were my love a lady grand,
In lace, and gems, and silken sheen,
With suitors sighing for her hand,
As though she were a queen;
She could not to my raptured sight
A lovelier, fonder maiden be,
Nor could she yield me more delight
Than now she yields to me!

She is not faultless, that I know,
But then, I cannot see the spot;
Her eyes are modest as the glow
Of the forget-me-not;
Her voice hath every gentle tone
That swells from love, kind, true and free,
And well I know she breathes alone
Its sweetest note to me.

The skies for us are ever fair,
The birds sing ever bright and gay,
No shade of doubt, no cloud of care,
Dims our resplendent day.
Earth's music only can we hear,
Earth's beauties only can we see,
For I'm in love with Nancy dear,
And she's in love with me!

1883.

MY LASSIE.

There's never a lassie I love so well,
As the lassie I've vowed to wed ;
Her eyes are blue as the bright blue-bell
That blooms in its forest bed,
And oh ! not ever the daintiest rose,
That smiles to the sky above,
Hath a hue as soft as the tint that glows
On the fair young cheek I love !

And I would not change for gems or gold,
Or a titled lady fair,
My own bright lassie o' homely mould,
Blue eyne and waving hair ;
Not even the royal brow of a queen,
And the jewelled crown above,
Could give me a taste of such bliss I ween
As the lips of her I love.

And I and my lassie will onward go,
And our own brave hearts shall beat

Through summer's sun and through winter's snow
With love's unchanging heat;
The storms may come, and the rains descend,
And the skies look dark above,
But a fonder note will the tempest lend
To the strong sweet voice of love!

1881

OH WHO'D BE A MONK IN A CLOISTER.

Oh, who'd be a monk in a cloister,
  Like a pearl in the depths of the sea;
Shut up in the shell of an oyster,
  With hardly a chance to get free!
Or, who'd be a soldier to rattle
  The shield and the falchion of Mars;
To either be killed in a battle
  Or come back disfigured by scars?
Not me—not me,
  And that is bad grammar d'ye see!

And, who'd be a sailor a-sailing
  The tropics, equator and zones,
In the sea to be buried a-wailing
  For fishes to nibble one's bones?
Or who'd be a lawyer to draggle
  One's honour through cases for pelf,
And Truth like a bargain out-haggle
  To finish by cheating oneself?

Not me—not me. &c.

Nor can I quite relish the notion
  Of being a doctoring knave,
To plaster, to pill and to potion
  Humanity into the grave;
And who would go courting the Muses
  When poets are criticised so,
You'd think they were standing abuses
  Instead of great blessings below?

Not me—not me, &c.

Why, sure, there's so many professors,
  The Earth's a big vanity fair;
With fools and with saints and transgressors
  I know not how many to spare!
So, like old Democritus jolly,
  I'll study the world and its ways,
And laugh at its sin and its folly
  Right on to the end of my days!
And be—and be,
  A philosopher merry as he!

1883.

BONNIE BESSIE.

Of all the lasses passing fair,
That I in merry England know,
Not one, believe me, can compare
With my sweet, bonnie Bessie, oh!
Then, gaily fill the brimming glass,
And let the toast to Beauty pass,
And pledge a health to my own lass,
Fair, bonnie Bessie, oh!

She's not a dame of high degree,
Nor any titled lady, oh!
But just as loved and dear to me
Is my fair bonnie Bessie, oh!
For love lurks in those laughing eyes,
As bright and blue as summer skies,
They could not well be otherwise
When they belong to Bessie, oh!

No silk nor satin decks her form,
But clothes ne'er made a beauty, oh!
Her blithe young heart is ever warm,
And worthy my own Bessie, oh!

For Virtue flings a radiant sheen
And gives a garment worth, I ween,
The costliest dresses of a queen
To my bonnie Bessie, oh!

And while I draw each fleeting breath,
Oh! Love will strong and stronger grow,
And last through life and live through death,
For my sweet, bonnie Bessie, oh!
And when all earthly toils are past,
May God with love unbounded, vast,
Just let me rest in Heaven at last,
With faithful, bonnie Bessie, oh!

1880.

MY BONNIE BRIDE.

Ho! pledge me a health to my bonnie, bonnie bride,
To my bonnie, bonnie bride, say I.
Here's a clink to her truth,
Here's a clink to her youth,
And one to her maidenly beauty forsouth;
Her beauty forsooth, say I.
Then pledge me a health to my bonnie, bonnie bride,
To my bonnie, bonnie bride, say I.

Ho! pledge me a health to my bonnie, bonnie bride,
To my bonnie, bonnie bride, say I.
Here's a clink to her tears,
Here's a clink to her fears,
And one to her tender and innocent years;
Her innocent years, say I.
Then pledge me a health to my bonnie, bonnie bride,
To my bonnie, bonnie bride, say I.

Ho! pledge me a health to my bonnie, bonnie bride,
To my bonnie, bonnie bride, say I
Here's a clink to the fame,
And the ever good name
Of the gentle young maiden who bashfully came,
Who bashfully came, say I,
To be to-day my bonnie, bonnie bride,
My bonnie bonnie bride, say I.

1880.

A TOAST.

Here's to an honest, good friend,
Who when troubles descend
And Dame Fortune, confound her,
Seems wed to the clouds
That so darkly surround her,
Will smile as of yore,
When Prosperity blessed,
And tender his help,
When he sees us distressed,
From the warmth of his heart,
Be it rough or refined,
As truthfully loving,
As faithfully kind,
Giving Humanity's
Brotherly worth,
Free from the vanities
Kindred to earth.

1880.

I KNOW A LITTLE MAIDEN.

I know a little maiden,
  A maiden, a maiden,
Whose gentle heart is laden
  With love for me alone.

Her glance so full and tender,
  So tender, so tender,
But sparkles to engender
  The passion she has sown.

So by the powers o' beauty,
  O' beauty, o' beauty,
My heart must do its duty,
  And claim her for its own.

1880.

MY ANNA.

Oh! bright is the ray of the Hesperus star,
And soft is the gleam of Diana;
But brighter and dearer and lovelier far
Is the bonnie blue eye of my Anna,
Is the bonnie blue eye of my Anna.

Oh! sweet is the strain of the sky-soaring lark,
The morning's melodious greeter;
But Anna's soft whisper can woo me to hark
With a cadence a thousand times sweeter,
With a cadence a thousand times sweeter.

Give princes and monarchs the castle's proud crest,
And palaces fashioned in splendour;
Give me the warm nook of my Anna's soft breast,
And there in that haven of love will I rest,
Nor fear an aspiring pretender,
Nor fear an aspiring pretender.

1880.

CAVALIER DRINKING SONG.

I'll fill me a flagon, and pledge me a health,
  And let the toast merrily ring ;
Shall it be to my castles, my lands, or my wealth,
  Shall it be to my country and king ?
Shall fond recollections of friendship enshrine
  Their worth in the roseate glow,
And give to the red and the generous wine
  A sweet and more exquisite flow.

Shall it be to the sword that hath faithfully hung,
  Unfickle and true by my side,
That hath valiantly, mightily, loyally clung
  Through battle's o'erpowering tide ?
And rightly or wrongly hath sturdily wrought
  On the foes of king Charles and his throne,
What vengeance mine instinct of chivalry taught
  Was meet for a traitor alone.

By my faith I've no king, neither children nor wife,
  And Fortune is withered and sere,
For my money, my castles, my lands, and my life
  Were staked for the king Cavalier;

And Naseby is dyed with a nectarine flood,
  And the winds dirge a mournful refrain,
For my monarch hath hallowed the axe with his blood,
  In the cause that he strove to maintain.

Yet still will I raise me and loyally pledge,
  Though shadowed is Royalty's gleam,
A beaker that bashfully boils to the ledge
  With its rich Bacchanalian stream ;
Not a health, but a slumber, unbroken and sweet,
  To the soul of my monarch so brave,
And a hope that the Devil may lure to defeat
  The traitors that fashioned his grave

1880.

WHEN WE MARCHED OUT FROM WOOLWICH TOWN.

When we marched out from Woolwich town,
For fame and glory starting, oh ;
From London many a lass came down,
For one last look at the lad she loved
And a long, long kiss at parting, oh !
At parting, oh ! at parting, oh !
And a long, long kiss at parting, oh !

When back we came so tired and worn,
Our hearts were sick and weary, oh !
For many a lad we had to mourn,
Who'd gi'en his life for the land he loved ;
Right heartily and cheery, oh !
So cheery, oh ! so cheery, oh !
Right heartily and cheery, oh !

Oh ! many's the sad and silent tear,
And many's the wild heart breaking, oh !
And many's the budding bright career
That fades whilst Life is still held dear,
In the rush of War's awaking, oh !
Awaking, oh ! awaking, oh !
In the rush of War's awaking, oh !

MAIDEN TO HER HEART.

Oh! tell me, my heart, is it love that now thrills thee,
As soft as the Zephyr, as wild as the storm?
Oh! tell me, my heart, is it love that now fills thee
With feeling intense as this bosom is warm?
Oh! say is the rush of emotion within thee
On Truth's snowy pinions in ecstacy borne,
Or is there a passion conspiring to win thee
As false as the blushes that fade with the morn?

Oh! tell me, my heart, for I long to receive him,
And joyfully mingle my love with his own,
Nor can I be heartless enough to deceive him
And press to this bosom in action alone;
One treasured so dearly that were he to vanish
His form to the grave and his soul to the skies,
My heart, thou wouldst break, and his absence would banish
The bloom from these cheeks and the light from these eyes!

1880

ALONE.

Shine on, bright star, if thou canst shine,
  Shine on and shine for aye;
I would not quench thy light divine
  Nor dim thy melting ray;
But, oh! what would I give to be
  Where thy bright glories are,
With kindred souls encircling me
  And every soul a star!

Sing on, sweet bird, if thou wilt sing,
  I would not bid thee stay,
But, oh! thy happy song can wring
  The heart that owns its sway;
Thou singest to thy feathered mate
  Beneath the starry sky
But I must mute in silence wait
  For ne'er a mate have I!

1881.

To ——

Thou star, that lingerest near the moon,
To thee I raise my plaintive song;
Say, will my dearie greet me soon,
Or must I mourn her absence long?
Thou hast for me a human voice
That thrills me from the radiant sky;
Oh, speak and bid my heart rejoice,
As in the happy days gone by!

When first I wooed with heart aflame
The gentle lady of my love;
Ye thoughts beyond an earthly name,
Ye hopes that reached to heaven above!
How oft have we in converse kind,
Loved many an hour of Time away;
With speech as soft as summer wind,
And glances burning as thy ray!

How swiftly flew the evening hour,
How brightly flashed the morning dew;
How sweet the scent from every flower,
The hills how fair, the sky how blue!

How Earth to very Heaven was turned,
How close my joy to throbbing pain,
When first I knew my passion burned,
Nor unrequited nor in vain!

Ye powers that bar the way to bliss,
And move a thousand waking harms;
Kind Sleep will bring my darling's kiss,
And give me all her radiant charms!
Sink swift, ye suns, towards the west,
Down, down, below the watery main;
And bring to my impatient breast
My gentle dearie once again!

1888.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

Page 24, line 5, for Rowland *read* Roland.

,, 24, ,, 14, ,, ,,

,, 44, ,, 23, ,, had *read* hath.

,, 51, ,, 22, ,, of *read* oft

,, 19, ,, 5, ,, thy *read* your.